

Living Vicariously Through Yourself: An Ethnography of LARPing

An Honors Thesis (ANTH 490)

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to provide a first person account of what it is like to LARP (Live Action Role-Play). For the general populace, it will provide a simplified yet comprehensive explanation of what LARPing is, how one might begin to play, and what the experience may entail. For the experienced LARPer, it will provide rudimentary analysis of aspects of LARPing and its potential role within the player's life to initiate further thought and self-reflection as to why the activity is a major factor in the LARPer's life. After reading, a LARPer should be able to apply the presented ideas into their life as well.

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Additionally, I would like to thank those in my past who initiated the love of LARPing and allowed it to grow. Thank you: Dave (for pouring your soul into the activity for me), Jeff (for pouring your time into it to make the games that much more fulfilling), and Jacob and Lucas (for pushing me through my paces to make me the best player I could be). On the opposite end, thank you, Donna, for having nothing to do with LARPing so I always had someone to go to when it became too much.

Finally, thank you to all of my teachers from grade school until now who inspired me to be passionate about what I enjoy, be the best student I could be, and to realize that those two things do not have to be separated.

CONTENTS

Forward.....	5
1. Introduction.....	6
What is this?	
Who am I?	
What is a Role-Playing Game?	
What Makes a LARP Different?	
What I Do in this Paper	
2. Entering the World.....	19
The World of <i>The Trials of Terra Nova</i>	
How to Go About Making a Character (My Technique)	
Making a Character that Fits in ToTN	
The Process of Making Ardemiya Florescence	
A Foot in the Door	
3. Plane Ticket to Terra Nova- Checking In.....	28
4. A Living World	32
Playing the Hero (Being a PC)	
Dying as the Villain (Being an NPC)	
Eyes in the Dark (Out on a Night Thread)	
5. Shared Fantasy.....	47
The World Comes Crashing Down	
Continued Strain on a Torn Fabric	
Stitching the World Back Together- and Turning it into Embroidery	
6. More Than a Game.....	54
Why does all of this Matter?	
Rehearsal for Life	
Game or Gutter	
Finding a Family	
Relationships Grow and Fall	
A Place to Experiment (Sober Drunkenness)	
Doing More Than You Thought You Could	
There is a Limit	
The Growth of the Character and the Person	

The Scales of Success	
Tolkien's Four Characteristics of LARP	
Parallel to Van Gennep's Rites of Passage	
7. Coming to a Close.....	78
How I Felt Doing the Project	
8. For Further Study.....	81
9. Appendices.....	83
Appendix A: Glossary of Terms	
Appendix B: Survey	
Appendix C: Sample Survey Response	
Appendix D: Why do you LARP?	
10. References.....	104
Works Cited	
Works Referenced	

FORWARD:

This document is meant to briefly dissect Live Action Role Playing for the general public. The document will explain the hobby of LARPing. It will walk the reader through different aspects of what the hobby entails and how to generally get started before analyzing the hobby itself. Experienced LARPers may wish to skip large portions in favor of finding those segments most interesting to them.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Giant Golden Eagle Battle – Ardemiya Florescence

The spotted Feline Archer led the troupe of adventurers down the trail following tracks indecipherable to the rest of the party. After hours of travel with little excitement, every action occurred at once. In the blink of an eye (with enough time left over to second guess what happened), the archer reacted to the slightest shadow and faint whistle of wind as he crouched low and fired upward with a devastating perfect shot to hit a giant eagle in the wing as it was plummeting at him faster than his kin could run. The arrow hit with just enough time for the cat to scamper back to the forming battle line to defend their tracker. A wall of shields held by a humanoid turtle and bear began to box the giant eagle in, trying to hold its spear-like talons at bay. A wolf swiftly ran into the fray to deal the eagle a mighty blow to finish the work the arrow had begun. The wing was shattered, preventing the bird from grabbing anyone and lifting them to their doom. Swords, claws, and hammer fell upon the great bird with feathers catching the blows like an iron rib cage cushioned beneath with quilts. Anorc clad in armor and robes circled around the back, muttering an incantation as he went. As he finished the incantation and threw out his hand to release a devastating bolt of lightning, he also let out a curse. After dilapidating the wing, the wolf had not retreated and was now caught in the eagle's talons, possibly within the line of destruction.

The Giant Golden Eagle Battle- Joshua Sullivan

We walked down the path. A HOLD was called and the NPCs surrounded the Ranger and described the swooping Big Bird. As they called Game On, the Ranger called his own HOLD. "16 piercing direct, Break Limb, Armor Breach, Precise Shot, Snare, Drop." Game On. The Ranger ran to us and was surrounded. The werewolf ran in and called a Break Limb on the

same arm as others attacked. The orc recited his spell. An NPC hit the werewolf with both clawsticks and called "grab" just before the Orc called a HOLD to count the steps of the line of his lightning bolt and let out a curse when he saw a PC grabbed.

What is this?

What you have just read is an ethnographic description of an event in a Live Action Role-Playing game (henceforth LARP). The first vignette describes what the players see; the story is described with imagination and in line with what LARPers imagine when they play in a LARP. The second vignette describes what is really occurring in the physical world; a chaos of actions and jargon is what would appear to an unknowledgeable witness. Players convert this chaos and jargon into a story that everyone gets to participate in. This document will serve as an ethnography of my experience in a particular LARP to be readable for the everyman as well as the experienced player to convert the chaos for the foreign eyes and give the veteran player a chance to look deeper into what is happening within the games.

First off, what is an ethnography? An ethnography is an account of an individual's experience within a culture. The researcher partakes in the culture as if it were their own, doing what the members do to directly learn about it rather than simply hearing about it or doing book research. Ideally, the researcher will share their general experience, specific details, how the individuals within the culture view the culture themselves, and then the researcher will share their own interpretation of what is going on. In some ethnographies, details are altered and the work becomes slightly more fictive in order to protect those the research is focused on. This technique is employed here.

This is an ethnography describing my time as a part of *The Trials of Terra Nova* and what I found to be true there. Research on LARPing is a relatively new idea but this is not surprising due to the relatively recent emergence of the hobby. Research has already begun by relating the socialization of players of MMORPGs (Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games) as akin to those of LARPs (Bergström, Jonsson, and Björk 2010) to specifically view how information travels between people and as an information system (Tuomas 2007). Still others have focused on how LARPs exemplify group decision making and consensus building behavior (Innes and Booher 1999, 9). LARPing provides research opportunities for anthropologists as well as sociologists and psychologists among other disciplines.

In order to do research for this paper, I will be employing multiple ethnographic techniques. The primary source of my research will be participant observation. This is a technique where a researcher enters the culture or subculture to be studied and fully participates within the activities as any other member would. To do so, I made a character within the game of the study group and participated in four weekend long games after having already attended a few games to get my foot in the door and discuss the potential of the project with the staff and players. The games were held on January 9th and 10th, February 13th and 14th, March 12th and 13th, and April 9th and 10th. I typically arrived at the wooded game-site of Bradford Woods in Martinsville, Indiana, at 10am on Saturday and stayed until the end of game on Sunday though the exact time changed based on weather and player morale. The games usually ended between 12pm and 3pm.

Once at the events, I would play my character and assist in playing minor roles and villains. I took notes about what occurred when I had an appropriate moment so as to not break the flow of the game. In addition to being careful of when I took notes, the bulk of my questions for fellow players were done outside of the game. To receive a considerable amount of information

at the convenience of the players, a survey (Appendix B) was written and shared among the player-base online. This survey was then spread by the players to other LARPers of their own volition to allow me a broader point-of-view from experienced players.

Finally, private interviews were held for those individuals who expressed interest. The interviews were held in public places of the interviewee's choice and were semi-structured. Ideas and topics were presented to the interviewee and conversation flowed naturally from those points.

Surveys were received from eighteen players of *The Trials of Terra Nova* as well as four LARPers who had never played this specific game. In total, those surveyed that had participated LARPs located within California, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, North Carolina, New Jersey, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin as well as one LARP in Canada. It is important to note that while this is the range of states that the LARPers have played in, most players who listed multiple states also listed multiple locations they have LARPed in each specific state. For instance, one player listed that they had played *Amtgard*, *Stygian Dreams*, *Circle of Swords*, and *Firefight!* all within Pennsylvania. Rather than listing specific LARPs within a state, some players listed multiple larger cities and surrounding areas where they had LARPed such as Indianapolis, IN, and Bloomington, IN.

Because this paper will be through my eyes, it may do the reader some good to know a bit about who I am.

Who am I?

My name is Joshua Sullivan. As a senior Honors undergraduate at Ball State University, I am required to submit an Honors thesis. Most Honors students do their thesis on a subject within their major and I am (or was?) a Biology major. However, having had a series of rigorous

Biology classes, a field study in South Africa, an internship in a zoo, and a volunteer position at a wolf sanctuary and rescue, I felt that I had a good grasp on field experience in my major. What I was lacking in was memorable experience in my Anthropology minor. Thinking back on my still short life, I looked for a good subculture I could explore in an anthropological thesis. The biggest thing that jumped out at me was the fantasy genre.

Growing up, my father exposed me to the fantasy genre early on. He read me books, showed me video games, and even pulled me from school for a dentist appointment... that happened to be at the movie theatre in a showing of *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*. The dentist forgot to show up.

My dad then started taking my brothers and I to a game called *Amtgard* in the fall of 2001. It is more of a battle-tag game where the players fight with foam swords, shoot foamed tipped arrows from bows, and “cast spells” in repeated combat scenarios and mini-games. When this game did not have the proper amount of role-playing and story for us, my father took the then current rules system that a Michigan-based KANAR game was using and adapted them to create his own game made especially for us: KANARAK (Knights and Nobles and Rogues, and Kids. I bet you cannot guess what KANAR stands for). KANARAK was started in June, 2002, and is still running though under different management. In addition to making it what we as elementary school kids wanted, it was also designed to be for kids where most LARPs are made for the young adult/adult audience.

I spent years LARPing as both a player and a “junior marshal” i.e. a youth who knew the rules well enough to act as a referee when the adult referees and storytellers were not around. Having had all of this time as a player and referee while a child, I stopped playing by high school. There were many reasons for leaving though many can be summed up into topics such

as “puberty” and “teenage angst”. I did not leave the fantasy genre completely because I still played games like *Dungeons and Dragons*, read novels by R.A. Salvatore, and watched movies such as *The 13th Warrior*, *Willow*, and *Stardust*. Over the years, I have tried a few LARPS and even acted as a backboard to bounce ideas off of in trying to create a new one.

Having now graduated from high school as the valedictorian and completed the bulk of my college career in the Honors College, I decided to set my sights back on my childhood pastime to better understand it as an outsider. Having had experience as a player, marshal, and indirect creator, I hoped to be able to come into a population of this subculture with an increased comfort level and learning curve but as an outsider to see the hobby with new and more educated eyes.

Prior to beginning my description of my experience as a part of *The Trials of Terra Nova* (abbreviated as Trials, Nova, Terra Nova, ToTN, and TN by the players), I would like to discuss role-playing games and LARPs in general for those unfamiliar with them. Experienced players may wish to skip ahead to sections they may find more interesting.

What is a Role-Playing Game?

The phrase “role-playing game” or “RPG” has the power to bring many things to mind due to the wide nature of the two individual ideas it contains. The simple idea of “role-playing” can exist in many scenarios whether it is in theatre, therapy, historical reenactment, or other private matters. The basic concept is that a person is taking on and acting out the role of another. This other personality may be a real person or one invented for a specific purpose. This invented identity may be extremely specific or a vague collection of traits, stereotypes, and mannerisms. When simplified, role-playing is a more serious version of “playing pretend.” Because of this, role-playing’s union with games is quite natural. When expanded a bit, role-playing games are

an improvisational form of social interaction where an agreed upon system of rules is established either formally or informally.

Depending on a person's age and experiences, different individuals may think of very different activities when confronted with the phrase "role-playing game". Certain people may think of games played around a dining room table or in the basement. Back in 1974, Gary Gygax and Dave Arnesen developed the tabletop RPG *Dungeons & Dragons*. This game provided a structured way for friends to tell group fantasy stories. Since then, the game type has exploded. In time, rules systems branched out like a tree and the topic grew to include every genre imaginable. There are even some systems, such as *Generic Universal RolePlaying System*, that focus on NOT having a focus.

It is important to acknowledge that not all forms of role-playing for entertainment are role-playing games. A relatively common form of role-playing is that of reenactment. Whether participating in an American Civil War reenactment or working in a renaissance fair, these activities are not included in role-playing games. Though the participants take on the personalities and mannerisms of another, the activity is more akin to theatre than it is to game play.

Other individuals may think of video games when RPGs are mentioned. I would argue that RPG genre of video games are not inherently role-playing games. They use structured development and decision making in story development that originated in tabletop RPGs but I believe video games do not allow the player to express themselves with the required freedom. Current video games do allow for a variety of options available but are still reactionary. Players are limited by the complex coding and algorithms of the game; they cannot easily initiate individual ideas into the game without excess amounts of work.

Despite video games not being true RPGs, this does not entirely eliminate the realm of the digital. There are digital spaces so dedicated to role-playing that one could say that it is possible to create a second life. In fact, *Second Life* did just that. This “game” is more of a virtual reality where a player can do anything that can be done in normal life. Whether it is meeting friends, making art, or buying a house, it can be done. This digital reality is so real that people have gone so far as to make their “real life” livelihood within the game by creating material within the virtual world and selling it for federal currency (Boellstorff 2008).

The two large factors that link digital games like *Second Life* and tabletop games like *Dungeons & Dragons* are alter egos and an established rules system. Both versions require that the player creates a character or avatar that serves as their alter ego within the game world. The only thing that limits the character is the agreed upon rules of the game. The rules then provide an exceedingly broad idea of what the purpose of the character is.

If we look at modern role-playing games as beginning with tabletop games such as *Dungeons and Dragons*, *Second Life* shows a path away from the kitchen table that leads to an extreme where players can sit behind a computer and interact with individuals from all around the world while taking on the role of an identity that can be entirely different from themselves with the other players doing the same. An opposite path has also evolved from the friend group in the basement in the activity of Live Action Role-Playing.

What Makes a LARP Different?

The greatest common facet of Live Action Role-Playing that separates it from other role-playing games is spelled out within its name: live action. Rather than friends sitting around a table describing what they want their alter egos to do or typing it into a chat window on the internet, each player physically acts out the desires. Wearing the character’s clothing and

speaking as they would, conversations are spoken from the view of the alter ego. Activities such as drinking, dancing, fighting, and artistic expression are either actually performed or, at the very least, pantomimed if not safe to actually do or the established rules prohibit them. There are many other similarities that LARPs share but they are not universal due to the great array of game types and play styles.

LARPs, like RPGs, can come in any genre and subgenre. LARPS can be based on medieval times, westerns, science fiction, post-apocalyptic scenarios, dystopian societies, and horror among others. Subjects can be as specific as vampires, werewolves, or zombies while other games can include any combination. Magic can be present in the games and rules systems or completely excluded.

Additionally, game mechanics can change how players interact. Some games that feature active combat use steel weapons and require considerable armor for protection. Other combat based games use weapon facsimiles made of foam, latex, cloth, and duct tape ("boffer" weapons). Still other systems contain the idea of conflict but rather than physical engagement, the conflict is either narrated, predetermined, or negotiated using cards, dice, or the classic tie breaker: rock, paper, scissors. It is even then possible to find games that eschew physical conflict entirely. During an interview, I was informed that the differences in game mechanics are extremely divisive and that there are few LARPer that straddle the fence between the physically engaging conflict and the passive conflict resolution.

If the choices were not great enough already, there are then varieties in terms of whom the conflict is between. In *Player versus Player (PvP)* LARPs, the individual players compete against each other. In *Player versus Environment (PvE)* LARPs, the players struggle against forces outside of the alter egos played by the players. The Player Characters (PCs) interact and

against the Non-Player Characters (NPCs). Depending on the LARP, NPCs can be anything from town citizens, political authorities, criminals, animals, monsters, or divine beings. Some *PvE* games subdue conflict between players. However, from my experience, *PvE* games allow for *PvP* encounters to occur because it makes the world more realistic.

Not to be left wanting, there is another factor that can make a LARP different. Mainly in *PvE*LARPs, the game can either be a Hub based game or a Trail based game. The difference is in reference to where the majority of the game takes place. A Hub based game is centered on a specific location. The game radiates from it but never goes far. Trail based games spend most of their time on a *trail*. The term *trail* is used because many LARPs take place outside in natural environments and the storyline is developed and encounters with NPCs occur out on a trail. Trail based games also have a Hub to come back to but they spend extended amounts of time away from it. This time possibly ranges up to four to six hours or even more in specific circumstances but is not required to do so.

Having provided a large variety of options that can be integrated into a LARP, I should say that this list is not exhaustive and is not discrete. This means that many more options can and do exist and that no single option is isolated from the others. They remain on a continuum. Different degrees of each option can be applied.

What I Do in this Paper

Having described a portion of the vast arrays of LARPs available, I acknowledge that my experiences in one LARP cannot exemplify all LARPs. However, I do hope that I will be able to share my unbiased experiences of this subculture in an entertaining manner and glean some understanding of the LARPing subculture that can be applied to a majority of LARPs.

The first section of this paper has described who I am and, in general, what this paper is about. The next portion will begin to get into some detail about the particular LARP I partook in and how to go about beginning to LARP. Once the setting of the researched LARP is established, the sections following that will then describe the general things one does while LARPing. The remainder of the document will go about analyzing different aspects of LARPing and its role in the lives of players.

As an academic endeavor, this ethnography is meant to be an unbiased account of LARPing. Both the positive and negative aspects of the hobby will be shown in contrast to the usually polarized view presented on the topic. A majority of all active players of LARPs are highly pro-LARP. It is possible that there are members of the community that share differing opinions and who play the games to spend time with a significant other, family member, or peer. However, when compared to the general population, there are very few middle ground individuals. Opposing the LARPing community is the criticism built up by popular culture. The general public will likely see LARPing in some form in the media even if they are unaware of it. Whether it is spoofed by comedy shows (*Tosh.0*), creeps into children's cartoons (*Spongebob*), or is portrayed in movies (*Role-Models*), people have seen it and it does not always get the best light. One player I spoke to described a professional, academic experience he had with LARPing placed in a deep shadow. The player was a student in a collegiate sociology class focused on subcultures and each student presented one subculture for discussion. The rule was to never be judgmental; the class was meant to be objective. However, the professor scoffed at LARPing and epitomized the activity with "the lightning bolt" video:
(See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j_ekugPKqFw)

Most LARPers know what this is. Though it does represent a portion of LARPing, it is taken out of context and a single “goofy” aspect of LARPing is blown out of proportion to make an unrepresentative caricature of the hobby. In actuality, LARPers are far more than a stereotyped weezy-voiced nerd. Depending on your LARP, players can range in age from a few month old infants to 70 or 80 year old grandparents. Some players may be school kids while others are stay-at-home parents, mechanics, engineers, and police officers. In an interview, one player described the player-base of another LARP they play in. On the east coast, some LARPs are made up of New York City lawyers, chefs, and CEOs who need time away from their hectic professional lives and a hobby to spend their money on.

In addition to providing an unbiased view, I wish to provide a cultural view that places LARPing as an aspect of life, not just a hobby. To do so, I will use techniques and ideas used in digital anthropology. Despite having already placed LARPing and digital RPGs on opposite ends of a spectrum, they behave culturally quite the same.

I have already mentioned *Second Life* and the impact that it has had on the lives of some of its players. Due to this impact, researchers of a variety of disciplines have studied it. Tom Boellstorff is an anthropologist among these researchers who has looked at *Second Life* not as a virtual reality, but a “real” reality. Boellstorff suggests that virtual is just as real as physical reality. He believes that the two are the same (Boellstorff 2008). Using this ideology, I wish to look at LARPing in the same light. Like Boellstorff’s virtual and physical worlds melding together into one, I propose that the fantasy world of a LARP and the mundane world of its players are quite the same and that there is no real line to distinguish between them. What happens in one has very real impacts in the other. Throughout this paper, I will describe different aspects of game play from both the vision of a player within the virtual game world (*In-*

Game or *IG*) and those of the mundane point of view (*Out-of-Game*, *OoG*, or *OG*). It is important to note that while I will be using the term “virtual”, it does not imply that it is any less real. Jones(1998) and Lindholme (2007) note that we view virtual worlds as fake because they are mediated. However, all worlds are mediated. Most people think of the “real” world as unmediated but it is. We are simply enculturated into it from a young age and the mediation seems natural. Those who do not follow these established rules and means of action that serve as the mediation are thought of as criminal or mentally ill.

2. ENTERING THE WORLD

"Okay, I'll play. Where do I begin?"

*"First you choose a race. You can play a wolf if you want. They
have Weres as playable races."*

*"Hmmm... that looks interesting. I could play a werewolf. Or I
coul-NOPE. They have elves. I'm going to play an elf. Moving
on."*

*"So you know, their elves aren't all woodsy. They are more like
the highly civilized city-folk."*

*"Oh, elves here are urban? Oh well. I'm a juggler anyway. Now
what are the cultures about?"*

*"They are loosely based on mainly European nations. Cacion is
French, Floria is Italy, Glesia is Spain, Innlund is
German/Teutonic, Nishanis generally Asian, Tir Na N'Og is all
weird magicky, and Veld is English/Scandinavian"*

"Floria it is then."

"Ok, now you need to do skills"

"This.... This... This... and the rest in Stunts."

"Really? You really want to-"

"Yepyp"

The World of *The Trials of Terra Nova*

In line with how I have broken down different aspects of LARPs, I will now categorize *The Trials of Terra Nova* based on my perception. Players of the game may disagree with my interpretation of the group but that is sure to arise when comparing different levels of experience of both LARPing and with the specific game. I would describe *The Trials of Terra Nova* as a lightest touch, boffer, combat oriented, trail-based, player versus environment, Medieval/Renaissance/Age of Exploration, high fantasy LARP. Yes, that is quite a mouthful. But worry not, dear reader, for I will break it down for you from broadest category to the smallest (which happens to be in reverse order).

1. High Fantasy- The world is filled with much more than just plants, animals, and humans. Elves, dwarves, and orcs walk among man along with *weres* (think werewolves but also with cats and bears), *waterborn* (humanoid bipedal turtles- looking at you Leonardo), and unicorns. Among the wilds is any assortment of monsters whether they be undead, congealed flame, or vicious plants. People are capable of controlling magic and calling upon the aid of a pantheon of deities.
2. Medieval/Renaissance/Age of Exploration- A majority of the world the game takes place in exists in a time period comparable to the cusp between our history's late middle ages and early Renaissance. The Old World is divided up into different nations that have similarities to nations and cultures from our histories and people live similar daily lives. One nation is more seafaring, another is epitomized by religion, while another is very military focused. Breaking from this generalized time era is Floria, which is equitable to Renaissance Italy. However, Floria is far more advanced technologically as if a da Vinci lived in every housing quarter and their creations worked. Machines are far more

common and clockwork devices exist breaking away from the medieval theme. The Age of Exploration then arises. I have briefly described the “Old World”. The game is called The Trials of Terra Nova i.e. the New World. The story takes place traveling with a large caravan moving up and down the new continent through colonies established by the nations of the Old World.

3. Player versus Environment- The main threat the players face is what the world has to offer. For the most part, the players work together to further their goals. This does not exclude rivalries and feuds but they are not currently the main focus of the game.
4. Trail-based- Much of the action and story develops out on the trail. Role-playing can occur “in town” (at the park’s cabin that serves as the Hub) but a majority of the game and game-relevant interaction occurs on the trail.
5. Combat oriented- Much of the game is based on physically overcoming obstacles. Most encounters are either fights or things like puzzles and traps that then lead to and impact fights. The game is increasing its non-combat gameplay but it is a slow shift.
6. Boffer- Fighting occurs with foam weapons. Armor can be worn for both costuming and to give a bonus in battle but weapons are safe to use on bare skin.
7. Lightest Touch- In combat, any weapon strike that cleanly touches the body (not blocked by a weapon or shield) is a confirmed hit that affects the player. This is different from games where hits must be hard enough to logically do damage in a real scenario to count as a hit. Additionally, blows should be intended to be light. The person being hit decides how hard is “too hard”. This is meant as a general rule but individual players may decide on an individual basis if harder hits and more contact in fighting is acceptable.

Different LARPS are different, defined by play style and size. *The Trials of Terra Nova* has a relatively small group of members and is a trail-heavy, combat-heavy game. While I played, the average numbers of players to come out was 20-30 each weekend

Terra Nova also has a few other selling points that I have heard. First, it has been described as a Hub based game. I have already described it as a trail-based game, but that is how players have historically portrayed the LARP. They are beginning to provide more puzzles and have PCs willing to stay at the lodge to role-play so this holds the possibility of truth. They are also said to be handicap accessible. This is substantiated by recollections of having a wheelchair bound player for a while and making it work at game. However, Terra Nova is also an extremely physical game, playing in and on terrain such as ravines that other games would never imagine to try. How does this match with handicap accessible?we'll talk about that a bit further in the paper.

How to Go About Making a Character (My Technique)

After identifying the type of game to be played, then next thing to do is to make a character. By looking at the broad strokes of what is allowed in the game (available classes, races, skills, powers), a player can then come up with the character he or she wants to play in the story. A race is what type of person the character is. A class gives a general idea of what the character can do or is good at and is similar to a profession. When choosing these options, character concepts, background, and personality that work with the system should be considered. Once a general idea of what the character is going to be is developed, the next step is to build the character based off of the rules of the game.

This is much like making an avatar online, except the disabled still can't walk nor the blind see. No matter how great the imaginations of the players, a physical disability that a player has

cannot be thought away when entering a live-action game. Different games may provide equalizing opportunities for specific players but it still must be within the realm of possibility. One creative and established action a game could take is granting a physically blind player a “third eye”. This player may be able to divine information or see the future as was common for prophets in the ancient mythologies of our world such as Tiresias from *Oedipus Rex*.

Unfortunately, whatever a specific game may choose to do or not, the player cannot be granted sight. In *the Trials of Terra Nova*, the marshal staff created lore within the game to accommodate a wheel chair bound player’s need of a motorized wheelchair. Depending on the disability and the game, different actions may be taken for different conditions. Some options within the game may even accommodate a disability without alteration. For instance, in *The Trials of Terra Nova*, there is a race known as *waterborn* who are akin to giant turtle people. They can become extremely fortified and resilient due to their shells but they must always walk slowly. A player with a handicap that causes them to move slower would be able to play this race with no disadvantage because of the player’s natural limitations.

When creating a character, it is important to keep in mind what it means to actually be a part of a given race or culture. “Being Human is a cultural and normative concept” (Ginsburg 2008, 29). This also applies to being an elf or dwarf or *Were* or *waterborn*. There are set ideas of what each race is within any given game world. It is possible to break away from the concepts but they cannot be ignored. Not everyone fits the cultural and normative definitions of being human but they do meet most of them. The places where you break away from the norm are there because of specific reasons and the dissonance from not meeting them also exists. The complexity of what it means to be a human, elf, dwarf, or glinkabork has a lasting effect on personality. What is a glinkabork? I do not know because I just made it up. Maybe it is a race

of people that stand three to five feet tall, have pink or mauve skin, live in groups of prime numbers, and have a taboo against eating pickled foods. Whatever it happens to be, though, there are norms about them and other glinkaborks would not easily accept one of their own breaking away from them. Like Jews eating non-kosher foods or Muslims eating non-Halal foods, a glinkabork eating a pickled cucumber would be ostracized by the rest of the group because it is breaking away from what it means to be glinkabork.

Making a Character that Fits in ToTN

When creating a character for *The Trials of Terra Nova*, there are a series of ideas to be kept in mind. Terra Nova is a magic heavy world where combat common. There are set races and cultures to choose from. Technology is limited with Floria at the top of innovation. Along with this, a character should have a purpose in the caravan. The storyline follows the traveling caravan so if he or she has no reason to be with it, why would the character be around for more than the handful of games the caravan is in any one town?

It is important to remember that when making character choices, the official generation process is simply what you are on paper. How you play it completely changes the character. When talking to new players, I heard the same conversation example multiple times. A veteran player explained, “On paper, Belthazar and I are basically the same character. But as Cory said, we PLAY them completely differently.” What the character is on paper just provides with how the player mechanically interacts with the rules. What the player does as the character makes them who they are. A simple mundane example is with police officers. Police officers generally receive the same training. They have the same skill set and generally have the same career. However, based on how a particular officer acts changes his reputation, relationships, and life. It is the same in game. Joe and John could each start playing as human warriors that use a great

sword and make money as armor repairers. Despite the similarities on paper, Joe is jovial and enjoyable to be around while John is determined to be the gruff, lone wolf. Joe is much more likely to find friends, have a good time, and get better business repairing armor. Both characters are equally valid but the similarities end at the character sheet.

The Process of Making Ardemiya Florescence

In order to properly participate in the game for my research, I needed to create my own character. As a basis, I decided to make an entertainer character. There were mainly reasons I made this choice of archetype. I had a foot in the door with a bard troupe that currently played and I have a variety of performance skills I have learned on my own after attending many Renaissance fairs. From the basic balancing and plate spinning to the dexterous juggling and whip cracking and even to the ludicrous fire-eating and strait jacket escapes, I decided that I could develop a character that could not only do these things but make a living off of them.

In *The Trials of Terra Nova*, after choosing your race, culture, and class, you are then given 40 points to buy the skills your character has. The skills come in different categories and each costs a different number of points. I then decided that I wanted to be less combat oriented. After having grown up playing characters that are both highly proficient in combat and a considerable force out on the battle field, I have grown tired of playing those characters. Rather than spend my points being able to use multiple weapons and be able to do special attacks with them, I chose more random skills. When LARPing I like having common everyday type skills that make me not feel stupid. Some of the skills I took were Math, Literacy, and Swimming. These may seem like silly things to have to “buy” for a character to do but it makes sense. Education is not generally common in a medieval time period. Learning to do these things would take time that could be devoted to things like martial practice with a sword. Having decided to not want to

fight more than I have to, I had the luxury to spend my points on these skills. However, by not doing combat based skills in a combat heavy game, I had plenty of points to put elsewhere. This allowed me to dump excessive amounts of points into the skill “stunts” to make me good at SOMETHING, even if it is not the best thing. This skill allows characters to do things like climb unknotted ropes. When bought multiple times, they can then easily climb trees and buildings and fall from great heights. This skill is used to role-play these feats when the story calls for them rather than doing them in real life.

Having created my character with the base 40 build points, I could then buy new skills with experience points (XP) I earned by playing my character in game. Depending on choices, a player can easily earn 2-4 XP each weekend.

In personality, Ardemiya is rather eccentric and absent minded but observant of trivial details. He walks around with his arms crooked into a W and hands waving little patterns. I have heard him described as a cross between Johnny Depp’s Willy Wonka and Captain Jack Sparrow.

A Foot in the Door

I have already mentioned how I had a foot in the door when making choices for creating my character. My foot in the door was my father. He brought me to play this game back in highschool for a few months. However, aside from the few NPC marshals I interacted with, I mostly felt like an unwanted outsider. LARPs are supposed to be inclusive and they very much can be, but LARPs fall to the same social tendencies as the rest of life. Some friends have stronger relationships. Cliques form. New players can decidedly see these cliques. I know I did and I was not the only one. A newer player by the name of Lucy has been playing for a few years now and when she first came she did feel like she was an outsider and knew no one. The

other players were welcoming but she still sat around waiting for things to start rather than hanging out with people as they got ready.

I do find it important to have someone to be with when starting a social game like this. It is not impossible to start alone but having someone familiar to relate to can help take the edge off. Most new players I have seen while at Terra Nova have either come with friends or they came alone once and then brought more people with them the next time. This is not to criticize the players in saying that they do not welcome new members but to acknowledge the fact that it is easy to feel alone when everyone around you seems to know each other better than their siblings and they may struggle to remember the new girl's name. A game that is meant to be inclusive should have a movement against cliques but they still naturally form like they do in the real world. This is simply how joining a new group works whether it is a LARP, sports team, or knitting circle. I saw veteran players doing their best to include new players but this can only go so far when they are trying to enjoy themselves as well. I generally suggest going to a new game with someone else but this is not necessary by any means.

3. PLANE TICKET TO TERRA NOVA-CHECKING IN

I turned off of the winding, hilly road onto a dirt and gravel path into the woods. My tan CRV loaded up with weapons, garb, and bedding bounced as the pitted road rocked the car back and forth. The juggling props in the back jostled around making noise not unlike when I drop them. I passed a clearing where the path loops on itself in a circle to the left running along a long series of garages and breaks off to the right to a one story lodge surrounded by trees. Through my open window I can hear a feminine voice call out, "Hey, it's Sullivan!" The welcoming feeling was cut off when a man's thin voice answered with a, "That's not Sullivan. Sullivan has a red car."

"No, not that Sullivan. The other Sullivan." Well this seems like a pleasant start.

After reading the rules, creating a character, and deciding on if you are going alone or with others, the next thing to do is to show up. Those running a game appreciate notice that you are coming but it is not required. The staff of *The Trials of Terra Nova* actually award additional experience points (XP) and veteran points (VP) for players that RSVP ahead of time.

When I arrived to *The Trials of Terra Nova*, the first step was to unload the car. Because TN runs Saturday to Sunday, I needed someplace to sleep. At this LARP, players can either sleep out in a tent or grab a bunk in the cabin used as the Hub for the game. After grabbing a bunk, I went to check-in which functions in a two part system. The first part is checking into the game and paying. Effectively, part one is OoC (out-of-character). The game is divided into three Cycles. Cycles act as dividers for the game. Spells and special abilities such as being able to knock a monster down with your sword recharge at the cycle. The first cycle is Saturday afternoon, the second is Saturday Night, and the Third is Sunday morning.

The cycles also effect what you pay to play at *The Trials of Terra Nova*. Every cycle a player plays his character costs \$10. They earn 1 XP per cycle. Experience points are credits given to characters to purchase new skills similar to when a character is first made. The first cycle a new player plays a PC (player character) is free. The other option is to play an NPC (non-player character). NPCing is free and the character earns VP. VP can be spent like XP but on different things. There are special character options unlockable with enough VP as well as Inspirations that act as mini boosts for your character usable once each time you buy it. The money paid to the game to play is used to make the game better. It is used to buy weapons and costuming for the NPCs as well as common supplies among other things. Some games can be considered for-profit games for the creators/owners and some of this money goes to them. Historically, *The Trials of Terra Nova* has been a nonprofit game. However, during the course of this project, I have heard people talking about this changing behind the scenes and there is general confusion on what was occurring and the reasons why.

Players may also choose to pay for food or bring their own. Food costs are typically \$5-10 and pay for either an afternoon snack or lunch, dinner, and breakfast. The food is diverse and good pending an expanded palate. Food can be simple hot dogs and fruit or curries, salmon, mixed salads, or other diverse meals typically partially inspired by whatever area of the game world the caravan is in. While I did my research, the caravan was in the Nishan (pan-Asian) town of Peach Blossom known for its peach groves. Because of this, peaches tended to crop up in meals though they were never unavoidable. The cooks generally plan ahead to accommodate dietary needs (another reason to RSVP).

This part of check-in, besides being the spot for money, is also where a new player submits their character sheet and where veteran players use their XP and VP to buy new skills.

The second part of check-in is Logistics. This is the IC (in-character) portion of checking in. All players get a logistics actions which can be things like earning coin (in-game money), spying on people, looking for resources, or tracking down an old ally. The player can then buy new items like weapons, armor, and potions as well as pay money to *upkeep* old items. The items a character has need to be repaired and maintained each month through *upkeep* because time has passed within the game world. The events within the game are considered to be about a month apart IG (In-Game) with time passing at the same rate as OG (Out-of-Game). The game does not start off directly where the last one left off. This keeps the season in and out of game in sync. Time also plays a factor in the actions of characters. Some characters may wish to travel to an area the adventurers have already been too. Depending on the distance, the character may be absent for a month, two months, or even up to a year depending on where they are traveling. During this time, the player will typically donate their time as an NPC.

Having finally unloaded the car and checked-in, the final step is to begin getting in character. The process of putting on the proper attire can be a major step in getting into the mindset of a character. One player's transition into character is a process. First, he puts green face paint on all of his exposed skin because he plays an orc. This begins the process of thinking in character. He then puts in fake teeth with tusks to further look the part. With the teeth in, he then takes the opportunity to assume the characters voice because the teeth will effect speaking either way. With the skin and teeth in place, the character becomes apparent. However, the tipping point is when the player dons his "rig": a robe, tabard, cloak, and metal breastplate. After all of this is done, the player is in character and wishes to be treated as such.

The process of assuming the mindset of my character took longer for me than normal due to the necessities of preparing for research, talking to players about it, and getting consent forms

signed. Aside from this, the main focus of getting into character was in properly attiring myself as was the crucial point already discussed. Ardemiyeen wore a white crinkled shirt with a blue floral pattern descending down the front in two parallel lines and black cotton nurse scrubs for pants. Over this layer he wore a custom gray and blue leather jerkin (vest) and a white scarf with blue outlined rust-orange hexagons as a sash around my waist to compliment the blues. Finally, a belt was thrown on which had a pouch the size of a miniature purse to act as a single large pocket as well as a hanger from a foam sword that looks like a rapier.

Due to the process of my research preparation each event, the simple transition of persona while changing clothes did not occur. For me, there was a different moment where I was suddenly in-character and it was not until the third game that I noticed this defining moment. Throughout preparing for both research and playing, there was a discrete moment where my arms would rise from my sides to be held in a W shape as I sauntered back and forth. Without deliberately telling myself, "It is time to play. I will be in character," there would come a moment where I would simply transition from Joshua to Ardemiyeen. The proper clothing helped but the transition was more than thinking about playing. I held myself differently. I walked differently. I talked to people differently. No, I am sorry. I did not do things differently because I was not there. Ardemiyeen was there.

4. A LIVING WORLD

Tavern Raid

Jolly conversation filled the tavern at night, the adventurers discussing what the next move would be. Suddenly, the door opened and an inferno filled the room, instantly dropping a civilian in a charred and simmering heat. Chaos ensued as bandits entered the room. I ran to hide in the back room but no sooner did I get there than bandits snuck in through the back door as well. I snatched my rapier for defense with just enough flailing to beat off the attacks. Roars of "WHERE'S MY STAFF?!?! WHERE'S MY STAFF?!?!" could be heard echoing through the room. I floundered about, letting others dispatch the bandits back here. After that, I rested easy knowing that there was a doorway between me and the rest of the bandits and I had something better than a door separating us. In the portal, I had a shell.

In play theory, or the ideas of how we as people play and what *play* is, the concept of flow is developed. "Flow is a state of temporary ego-loss that comes from immersion in activity, usually (but not always) activity framed as play..." (Holcomb 2000, 62). I believe this concept is excellent for typical play, but I feel it falls apart for LARPing as a character. As a character, your ego is not lost but partially transformed into a new source. However, as an NPC, I believe this entirely fits. As an NPC, the players completely give in to the game because there is no danger to themselves and their role is to be the game that the characters are playing in. This next section of the paper will deal with what it is like to play in the different roles of the game.

Playing the Hero (Being a PC)

I started the paper with an exciting hero entry and in this section's vignette I presented a very different view. People think of heroes going and saving the day but they can also be the sole protectors or even victims in a desperate time.

In general game play, the heroics originate in a few common areas. The first place is the job board. Jobs will be posted by various NPCs for the heroes of the caravan to investigate. These can range from looking into bandit activity, locating items, or hunting down monsters such as basilisks, aura tigers, and any number of creatures either common to the fantasy genre or made up by the staff for the game. NPCs can also be seen wandering around talking to people about their troubles and the PCs can choose to interact with them or not. One character I encountered early on was the crazed old wizard Mortimer that spoke about having a missing jar. He said not to open it if we found it. He never specifically went looking for it but it did happen to show up because of the odd and coincidental area we resided in where things happen without reason and not even in the right order. At one point, the party of adventurers were paid for completing a task before they even knew about it. The characters blamed it on "The Tir", a place where magic flows so strongly it warps reality.

It is common for a game to be focused on the characters going out on jobs and missions to help make the world a better and safer place. Unfortunately, this usually involves combat of some nature and danger. Players spend much of their XP on becoming bigger, stronger, and more powerful to deal with these dangers. Martial players spend points on being able to do more damage with weapons while magic-users acquire new spells to do damage or protect from it. Priests gain new powers to protect peers and further their deity's goals which hopefully align with those of the caravan. And me? I find more ways to be... useless. Without directly

harming the caravan, my choices turn out to be rather neutral. My most useful action when on a mission is prancing about the battlefield as a distraction, or far better, being a “battle buddy” by collecting arrows for the archer that tracks down most of our enemies.

Characters accumulate power based on how long they play. However, no one can do everything. The strongest warriors are susceptible to magic, the clerics can be betrayed, and the poisoners and thugs don’t stand a chance in one-on-one combat (in theory). Player skill is always a factor but character abilities all even out in the long run. Additionally, we have to think cinematically. In the Giant Eagle fight that I described at the beginning of the paper, the real danger was not the damage of combat (though real enough). The danger was being picked up, flown into the air, and dropped. It does not matter how much armor a warrior wears or how many points he spent on his fighting skills if he is dropped from a few hundred feet in the air. For some encounters, we have to think cinematically.

Another important aspect of playing a character in the game is interaction with other characters. Interaction with other players is In-Character (IC). During the Feast of Valkar that was held in February, I was performing for everyone in feast hall. I juggled in front of the nobles and spun plates on a stick for the common folk. Functioning as a jester, I purposely offended the intelligence of one patron and the balance of another attendee. Not all of my offences were on purpose though. After spilling water on an orcish warrior due to a bad call on my part, the orc flipped out at me. She grunted and scowled while throwing accusations of my intent. Afterwards, though, she pulled me to the side to make sure that I knew it was all IC. She held no ill-feeling towards me and wanted to make sure I knew it was not personal. I noticed this behavior too with another player. Bruce has a habit of getting vocal when it comes to his values. After a “rage-fest” back and forth with someone, multiple people have attested that he will pull

you to the side and do a little “That was all IC. Are we cool? I’m cool, are you cool?” This topic was brought up again and again by veteran players. I even found myself having my own experience of this.

The party of adventurers was out on the trail looking for a bandit stronghold. After an interaction with some highwaymen, a strange man who refracted sunlight eerily (we knew this because the NPC said “I seem to refract the sunlight eerily”) appeared to the party and started to frantically talk to some of us. He scrutinized us, asked personal questions, and asked us to rephrase our own questions of him when he did not like the way we said them. His name was Emerald. When prompted by an invitation where we didn’t know what we were inviting, Emerald looked viscerously into people’s eyes. He rushed close to them, grasped their head with his hands, placed his forehead on theirs, and opened his squinted eyes wide. The victims of this saw their entire lives vividly take place before their eyes and collapsed to the ground in pain, queasy and slightly ... recharged if they had the abilities to cast spells. Having seen this happen to two victims and deducing as much as I could from it, I wanted it too. Ardemiya is an elven performer. With elves living multiple centuries, a young adult elf already has decades under his belt. For a performer, that means decades of training and performances. The victims saw their whole lives in what seemed like real time. For a performer, especially in a place where video recording has never been known, getting to re-see your life is an amazing opportunity. Ardemiya only saw that he would get every lesson, every training, and every hour of practice again. Each performance would appear again. The good moments and especially the bad. The previous two victims despised having to see their own horrors again. For a performer, however, every agonizing mistake on stage would be an opportunity to remind himself what not to do, what went wrong, what the solution was.

Ardemiyen purposely asked to have this parasite enter his head. Emerald enjoyed doing this and it was how he felt alive, but he needed permission and Ardemiyen gave it. Unfortunately, one party member did not. Emerald needed complete permission and a monk was opposed. Emerald started to count down but the monk would not give verbal confirmation. She merely got upset and crumpled to the ground in sorrow about my actions. Having counted down, Emerald left and I freaked. I knew I *Josh* was fine and calm and sedate but I *Ardemiyen* was pacing and screaming and whip cracking. I crouched down and peered into the monk's saddened eyes and tore her apart. "I don't want my friends to get hurt. If it has to happen to someone, it will be me," the monk said. "How much of an idiot are you?" I countered. "It doesn't HAVE to happen. He had to be invited. I wanted it to happen. You weren't saving anybody. Look, Lucy's fine. The wolf is good." I said, motioning to the two other "victims" who were recovering now that Emerald was gone. Tears broke from her eyes and traced lines down her face as she remained kneeling on the ground. "Even if you did it, I would just follow up. What do you have to gain from reliving your miserable life? To see your monastery collapse again. To hear the screams of those hurt and dying." I paced away and then came back. "Idealism is not a trait that everyone finds admirable," I spat with an acrid tone. After the incident, I pulled the player to the side to make sure she was good and she said yes with a smile. I had no problem with the player. My character had a problem with hers. However, it was not all fake. The emotions were real, at least on my end. I understood what was going on, what I was feeling. It felt like when I am watching a TV show and the bad guy has the hero captured. He has to get out and save the love interest but he shows up a moment too late. The emotions existed. There was sorrow and anger and helplessness... yet I was completely fine.

Player characters have much they can do as their characters and an incredible amount of possible interaction. Despite this, “Although they do participate overtly, players –like hecklers– are in an intrinsically responsive role.” (Holcomb 2000, 61). Yes, this quote was made in terms of a tabletop game, but it easily falls into LARPing. *The Trials of Terra Nova* is a heavily character responsive game. Most interaction occurs as a reaction to the NPCs. There is infinite potential for characters to initiate game events in LARPs but this is still in its early stages at *The Trials of Terra Nova*. There are a few players making efforts to do so because what we chose to do also matters. An easy example of my own is the performances I did at the Feast of Valkar that I have already mentioned. Another player approached me between games about having characters performing and I ran with it. Throughout the night, I juggled, balanced, joked, and even provided a challenge to keep me in a Floren Waistcoat (what I decided to call a strait jacket) with a monetary prize to the person who tied me up if I could not manage to escape. Between my performances, I announced other performances. As people stood up to sing their songs, other people wanted to do so too.

The month following the Feast of Valkar, the guild leader of the bard group held his own performance in the middle of the game to make up for him missing the feast. This was required by no one. He did it because he wanted to and because his character wanted to.

In addition to these performances, I also engaged in other teaching activities during the games. When I created my character, I bought all of the grades of the stunts skill that I could. Once I started playing, another character who wished to learn more of this skill came to me. It turns out he could climb reasonably well but not as well as he wanted and certainly could not land from a fall as well as he wanted. The character had broken a limb from falling too many times. Rather than simply going to the book keeper and saying “I want to buy X grades of

stunts”, he came to me as a character and asked if I could teach him. I gladly did and came up with a handful of exercises to work on over the coming months. Each month, he bought another rank and this ended with an in-character challenge for him to earn the last grade. Did he have to do this? By no means, but this player loved the role-play and physicality. He was willing to do so. After we started doing stuff, other characters joined us because it was something really happening. He did not just say “And now I am better at this skill.” We worked on it and played around.

The topic I have been describing is that of the “prosumer”(Beer and Burrows 2010). A prosumer is when a producer is the consumer and vice versa. This concept is common in digital anthropology and can be seen on internet sites such as YouTube. The people who produce the videos are also the consumers. Yes, not all of the viewers make content but a large majority of the creators started due to their love of watching. It is the same with LARPing. The players are the ones producing the content and the content producers also play. If we as players do not initiate within the game, the players can become stagnant. I was informed after the Feast of Valkar that it was the most interactive feast yet because I kept everything going around people rather than allowing them to simply settle into their cliques. The best LARPs are made of prosumers and new players need to be taught that when they play their characters.

Ideally, I would like to play a game where the players initiate 66-75% of the game play. Yes, I do believe that there needs to be material provided from the game staff to keep the world going and to introduce dangers and conflict. This conflict, though, does not need to saturate the weekend.

Dying as the Villain (Being an NPC)

Having seen what it is to be a player character (PC), now we flip the coin. Playing non-player characters (NPCs) is just as important as PCing when it comes to LARPing. One player I talked to makes a habit of playing his character for a year and then donating a full six months to solely NPCing. Rather than randomly NPC, he makes sure to pay his dues to the game and devote half a year to making sure he NPCs.

Many people have different specific ideas of what it means to play an NPC but they are all correct and they are all generally the same when taken to heart. The list of responsibilities of an NPC are: "Too give other players a good story", "provide entertainment", "to make the game both fun and challenging", "help players immerse themselves in the world", "fill the world", and my personal favorite response which came up multiple times, "to die".

NPCs make the world a world rather than just The Adventurers Surrounded by Trees. If players did not volunteer to play NPCs, then the game would be the players being adventurers and heroes standing in a forest with no threat to address. I did stress the idea of the prosumer and I did not mean to have discounted the NPCs. The players also NPC and the NPCs are a product of prosumers as well. However, the final answer of "to die" does show a deal about *The Trials of Terra Nova* and LARPers in general. This game is a combat heavy game which means many NPCs are combatants. They make the jobs/missions/quests challenging and, in the end, they should hopefully die or run away. However, even in less combat intensive games, players like the NPCs to die. This is because players are naturally ego-centric. The game is about them. No one wants to play a character and be seen as a side character by everyone else. If you want to be a side character, play an NPC. As a player, you want the NPCs to typically die. This of

course does not count the innocent civilians and children in distress... unless you are evil, of course.

The biggest aspect of NPCing that I noticed as a researcher before helping with the task was the illusion of things happening. Even if there are no more planned encounters, NPCs continue moving further down the trail so the players think the quest goes on even if they are about to finish up. The NPCs then head back to camp ahead of PCs so they can “set up” for another encounter on the way back. The head trap master who rigs trip lines attached to mouse traps and nerf guns continuously goes on the trail in down time to work his traps. Is he setting more up? Taking more down? Who knows? Only he does. It is the unknown that keeps the danger alive. Knowing danger is easier than not knowing.

My experience as an NPC during this project was quite interesting. The first day I NPCed, I actually arrived late to the NPCs because I was talking with another player about the game. When I arrived, the NPCs had already taken the form of wolves and set up for an ambush on the party. They had white cowls on (hoods that come down over the shoulders) with ears on them so the players knew what they were. They decided to have me lay down as a recently killed merchant. I do not like the misinterpretation of wolves as people-hunters and -eaters (Biology major, remember?) but I did not argue and simply flopped to the ground dead. When the party arrived, most of the wolves went to defend their meal while the last dragged me away (wolves are strong within the game so the NPC can simply grab me and say *Come-Along* or something similar and I can stand up and move with them. I was not actually dragged although I would have allowed that). As certain party members pursued, the wolf sprinted off with me. Eventually they caught the wolf and killed it. The reason the party chased me is because they had a high priest of goodness and healing with them. This high priest's view is that if the wolves

are defending the kill, it is fresh, and if it is fresh, he can still save the victim. The high priest then began to incant and using the power granted by his Mistress Mercy (Terra Nova's deity of healing), I was raised from the dead. However, I was not told information about this man other than "Merchant" so I started making stuff up.

I groaned as I opened my eyes. I looked down and saw (I imagined he would see) tattered clothing and blood everywhere and I started to panic. Quickly, the bard who accompanied the healer began to sing a magic song that charmed me into believing he was my best friend. From there, he calmed me down and brought me back to the party of adventures. I started to ask about where my nephew Hisu was which I made up on the spot to give the character more depth. When given the chance, I went to talk to a marshal to get more information and to inform him that I had a nephew. I figured it would be nice to let the story marshal know what I was making up. The rest of the story would take another three pages but suffice to say I found my nephew and wandered into Peach Blossom to never be seen by the party again. Why did I bring this story up if I had not the time to finish it? I did so to show that NPCing is not always what you expect. Everyone I surveyed said that the NPC's role was to die and to push forward plot. I showed up late to my first NPC cycle and consequently: did not play a bad guy, was saved, and then made my own plot that had nothing to do with what the original plot was supposed to be. NPCing is what you make it.

My next cycle NPCing went quite differently. I arrived in time for the preparations and the first encounter we performed was a combat as zombies and skeletons. Rather than just fight, though, we as NPCs spent ten to fifteen minutes before the PCs arrived coming up with a story as to why we were there. No one ever learned why. It did not matter. We gave ourselves more purpose and flavor. I have heard talk that a lot of NPCing is sitting around talking out-of-

character while waiting for the players. This experience showed me that you only have to waste the time like that if you want to. The other option is to create more in the world even if only you know about it.

Following the undead encounter was another wolf encounter. I have already shared my dismay at making wolves the bad guys because it is unnecessary and unrealistic. I talked to the other NPCs on the way to the next combat location about doing some RP with the wolves and I was met with a, "This will be a fight. There are few combats today so this WILL be a fight." Not disheartened, I continued the conversation with a "Yeah, but that doesn't mean we can't have some fun with it". I then convinced a guy and girl to take the positions of alphas and I took the bottom omega position.

As the omega, I was a bit beaten up and was laying at mouth of "cave" that we outlined as our den while the others were inside. The plan was for me to come in and let the others know when the territory intruders arrived. Out of nowhere, I heard "Josh, permission for full contact?" coming from the other NPCs. Asking for permission for full contact lets one player physically handle another player to their comfort level. Without permission, a player should not aggressively touch another outside of approved combat weapons. I responded with a "...yes. Do whatever you want." No one was there yet and I was already giving permission to be beat on. Because of the white hoods, the PCs new what I was from a good way down the trail.

The character who came first was a werewolf druid. Druids are one with nature and animals and being a werewolf either made the conflict with the wolves worse or better. I described to her my obvious injuries and let her know my probable pack position before limping off to the back of the cave. The two Alphas came out and talked with the druid. I slowly crawled back out and got snarled at by the alpha female for coming too close. Soon, combat ensued and I ended up

being the last one alive. I was injured already, got hit in the knee with a hammer and decided I had a broken leg. As I limped away, the Druid and Ranger argued about killing me or not. The druid did not want me to die because I was simply doing what my pack required of me. The ranger was determined to shoot me for being a danger to them and travelers. After being shot, the druid came and slightly healed me. I let out a series of cries and whimpers as she tried to calm me. She then gave me a *phys.rep.* steak (*Physical Representation*. i.e., a prop to represent a beef steak), and let me crawl home.

After I escaped, I donned an orange hat and went out to her. In *The Trials of Terra Nova*, an orange hat or headband on an NPC signifies that you are not there with similar meanings in other LARPs. I returned her steak and then whispered to her, "Do you feel proud that you saved that one?" "Yes." She said with a smile. "Well you didn't. It is going to die. You left it stranded with 1 hit point, a broken leg, and limited food. And even if it wasn't injured, it would still die. You just killed its pack. Wolves are so highly pack animals that they will die without a pack due to depression. Sure it could try to find a new one, but they likely won't accept it. And it can't even do that due to the injuries." The druid sunk into a deep frown. When I returned to the NPCs, they told me, "We heard that whimper from across the field. You cut her heart like a knife".

That was another long story but with good reason. Although the encounter was intended to be a simple combat, I changed it into something more. I am not an expert on wolves but I do certainly know more than the rest of the players. Rather than leaving the encounter as a simple combat, I adapted it to see where it went. In the end, it was educational for a player. The player plays someone who is one with nature so I used the encounter as a memorable teaching opportunity. Moreover, though, she is playing a wolf character so I taught her something that

can help with developing her character and understanding more of what it is to be a wolf. As said earlier in the paper, “being human is a cultural and normative concept.” This also applies to *werewolves* and now the player understands what it means to be a wolf that much better.

What I did with a wolf is not singular though. When LARPing, or playing any RPG, players, especially NPCs, are granted the opportunity to teach. I know about wolves and took the opportunity. Another character has studied Mandarin Chinese and been to China before. Once the caravan entered the Nishan colonies, he started using that knowledge. When playing dice games with players as an NPC, he started teaching them Mandarin numbers. We had a conversation involving real superstitions over dinner. Another character needed to learn “ancient Nishan” script in game, so an NPC started to teach her how to read and write in Korean. NPCing may have the surface image of “to entertain and to die”, but it can do and be so much more than that if the players are willing.

Eyes in the Dark (Out on a Night Thread)

Playing a character or an NPC during the day is one thing. It is a completely different beast to go out during the night. Even after years of playing, night threads (thread being equivalent to story, trail, or quest) still immediately get the adrenaline flowing for me. It is important to be safe and not die as your character during the day. The night simply makes it worse. Bigger monsters and threats have the possibility to show up at night. On the chance that they are not more dangerous, the dark makes them so. I have poor night vision as a person which makes it quite unnerving to walk into the woods where untold evil could be lying in wait for a trap.

Bring some light? Sure, that can work. Unfortunately, they still have not invented flashlights so the best source we have are lanterns. They let you see immediately around you to walk safely. However, they ruin whatever night vision a player does have, preventing the

carriers from peering out in the dark. To make matters worse, the adventurers are not the only eyes that are out there and whatever monstrosities lurk beyond the small alcove of light can see the lantern coming for a distance off. They have no need to guess where the adventurers are because the adventurers have laid themselves out on the table to be fed upon. I have heard one account of night vision goggles being used but it was for a very specific quest and they were functionally a hinderance due to quality.

The most prominent night thread I was a part of did not stray far from town. Having only gone just down the trail to slay zombies, we returned when shrieks arose from the town. When we arrived, there was a monstrosity wreaking havoc and simply reeking. Armored from head to toe in plates of thick, hardened, presumably boiled leather and wielding a large sword, the things head was contorted and frenzied skull. It had already terrorized the town, vomited curdled blood over the bard guild's banners to the deities, and now began to cut through us in swathes. The NPC was actually in a beautiful set of full armor and had a large skeletal latex mask on which left no body exposed. Unlike the wolves where the players have familiar cues of what they saw due to a cowl and body behavior, what we saw here is exactly what we got. I just wish he had been dressed like a fairy princess.

Having carried another party member back to town due to a leg injury (caused In Game. Out of Game injuries are taken seriously and there are health marshals to provide immediate care), my only thought was to find the physician or hide on the tavern roof until this demon skeleton was gone. It turns out that hiding on the roof would have been a great plan because this monstrosity was a Grave Knight. An undead warrior of great prowess, it possessed the abilities to sink into the ground when waylaid, leaving behind a shallow grave. It could then re-appear any place the ground would allow. Fortunately, it could not come up through the taverns cement

floor nor therefore onto the roof. What makes the roof better than indoors? It still has the possibility of entering the tavern in the most inane way possible: through the bloody doors.

I spent that evening running away. Whenever it showed up in a burst of overturned earth, I turned tail and fled. It may have not have been the most heroic thing, but it kept me alive. I might have helped fight it off but nothing we hit it with really hurt it. The only way we managed to hurt it was from a powerful cleric using potentially his most powerful spell. By sacrificing his armor, he called upon his deity to temporarily transform himself into a construct. No longer a creature of flesh, he was made up of pieces of leather, wood, and metal all woven together into a body run by magic. This construct managed to beat away the grave knight once, twice, and a third time. Not only were his blows heavy and powerful, but there were imbued with divine energy. Every time the grave knight fled in mound of corrupted earth, the construct patrolled the town. It was an incredible sight to see (... imagine...) but I made sure to watch from a distance for fear of a stray blow meeting me.

5. SHARED FANTASY

We just ran up a staircase of clouds to a bandit camp. Prepared for battle, The Minstrel sang and ensnared the mind of an enemy.

"Oh, won't you come and be my friend

And stay with me until the end.

Until I'm done and set you free,

When this song is done, my friend you'll be."

"Come and help me. They are attacking me," said the Minstrel, persuading his new friend to help us.

"Naw, they're my friends, too. I trust them"

Other bandits charged me and I rapidly wove my rapier about attempting to deflect their blows.

"No, no. Come and help. I need you."

"Naw, I don't want to get in the middle."

"You have to."

"No I don't."

"You do. As a dominate eff-"

"-But it's not. It's a charm."

I tried to continue to fight off the enemies but I grew distracted as did the enemy.

"No, it specifically says you have to-"

"-It does not."

In but a moment, the world lays shattered on the ground

The World Comes Crashing Down

This game is a shared fantasy. The players must buy into the world created by the marshals and people running the game but the marshals must also cater to their audience and provide a game they want to play. This is even more important in a smaller game where each player has a larger role and impact on the game and where mundane friendships are more closely tied.

What I described in the section opening vignette happened because there was a disagreement in the shared fantasy. This is not the first occurrence of this happening and it is not the last. Times like this are quite common across LARPs but happen more at some than at others. If it is common at a specific LARP, how can this be helped? I will use the occurrences at *The Trials of Terra Nova* as an example.

At ToTN, there was a recent staff change and the senior marshal who participated in the shown disagreement recently stepped away from his previous position over game story and mechanics to take up a new managerial one. The end result could possibly be less of these minor feuds but the actual purpose for the staff change has been given many reasons.

Another marshal has stated that there were other players in the past who had similar issues with the previous marshal. He possibly stepped away from the position to create a happier playing environment. Player A informed me that the senior marshal wanted the Corn Maze event held in November to be epic and many players were disappointed with it. Another feud broke out there and led the senior marshal to being disappointed in what he had planned to be the furthest thing from it.

When I spoke to this marshal about the position shift, he told me that the staff change was to free himself up for other projects he wished to pursue. This reasoning was confirmed by Player B who informed me that the senior marshal had spoken about stepping down months prior for the same reasons.

A final player spoke about the marshal's issues in private life in a very respectful manner so I could understand another possible view point. This player let me know of a particularly difficult relationship termination the marshal had been working through. He also mentioned that the marshal had devoted consecutive years to the game and how he felt that the marshal simply needed a break.

I believe the truth lies somewhere in the middle as the truth typically does. Years of devoting yourself to a specific cause can grow tiresome. Even when it is a cause you love, time has its own price. When the cause happens to be providing joy to others, the stress of someone being responsible for happiness adds a considerable amount of pressure. Breakups can impact every aspect of a person's life and the additional strain could be what has led to consecutive perceived failures between a joy-provider and his recipients. In a social activity, issues will always arise with different viewpoints. In the end, everyone eventually needs a break and alternative projects are a great way to do that.

I began the destruction of the world with a large implosion but it does not take a large implosion to destroy a game moment. Small tears can shred the fabricated reality. People talking about movies, scientific innovations in Germany, or the semantics of the rules and how to make the best character can all chip away at the shared fantasy that the players are living in.

If players wish to have those conversations, they should have them outside of game. They are HERE and they paid to be here. PLAY. One interviewee was rather blatant about the OC

chatter IG: "It drives me up the freaking wall." It can be quite simple to drift out of character if other players are out of character. It spreads like a contagion and the best means to deal with contagions are to quarantine them. Unfortunately, rather than quarantining the few patients into a sick ward, it seems like the palace of healthy nobles are quarantined from the sick populace of the city. This became readily apparent when characters began preparing for a large event like the Feast of Valkar. Rather than stay IC, it began to sound like the morning of a wedding or before prom in a cheap Disney channel movie. The excitement was too much to contain and people wanted to talk about past feasts without realizing that they could have done that IC.

Another consistent time of general breakdown is during Sunday mornings. I was fortunate enough to hear one player make a comment that "Maybe one day we might be able to stay in Character at breakfast." They continued that rather than be IC, one player loves to use it as their time to talk to people about whatever she wants.

Continued Strain on a Torn Fabric

Though I described a major meltdown of character reaction to game marshals, this can be felt as a general feeling and understanding among players. They described to me how it works. One marshal is extremely creative and dramatic. He provides a good story. Another knows the system inside and out, what works, what doesn't. He can keep the story realistic to the players. Together, they can write incredible threads. If they step over their bounds or don't listen to each other, the story can get bad and many near-party wipes can occur (a party wipe is when one encounter kills every PC on the adventure. This is typically frowned upon). A well-mixed combination is best.

Another player who has worked as a professional story teller at a game shop for years has provided this criticism: They have developed an extremely detailed world and streamline rules

system. They have a phenomenal grasp on their own game. They simply lack in execution. This criticism matches an idea presented in Holcomb's dissertation: "The link between performance of the game and creation of the game is very important here, because a thoroughly developed game world reflects deeper involvement on the GM's part." (2000, 95) Though positive, this quote can be taken in the inverse fashion. Failure to perform can appear as a failure of the world involvement of the game marshal's. Having one on point can help the other but failing in one can also hurt the previous.

I have presented a few views from players on the high and low points of the game and how players view it. They are not completely debilitating. As I have previously described, both the players and marshals are pro-sumers. Both consume the world but they both also produce it. Small steps by everyone fix these problems and make the world a better place.

Stitching the World Back Together - and Turning it into Embroidery

One person can destroy a game but one can bring it back. Subsequently after complaining that Sunday mornings are always filled with OoG content, this player then left the lodge and began to RP outside alone. Others joined and soon there was also a *werebeneatha* tree sharpening knives while humming, a songbird in a tree tweeting, and a martial artist doing his morning tai chi routines among others. I too have mimicked this countering of OC content though more... aggressively.

Sitting at dinner one night, people were completely OoG with new players. I believe the new players need to learn that this is bad. In the middle of their conversation, I spoke up, addressing a player by their character name, and started asking them things about the area that I did not know about that I believed she did because her character was from around the area. Did she as the player have any idea? Probably not, but it brought the game all back together.

Being IC is a collective responsibility. Some characters do an amazing job at keeping the game IC. One newer player really understands the concept and is constantly IC to a nigh-frustrating degree. The player is very intelligent but the character is extremely slow to think and literally always literal. The player's intellect only goes to increase the deliberate, innocent, and ignorant nature of the character. On top of that, he has a rather laborious rig of costuming to wear which he never takes off while playing his character. If he happens to be playing his character all weekend, then it never comes off. This goes so far as to interfere with how he sleeps but he trudges through it at a steady pace.

The last note I wish to make about pulling the world back together has to do with breakfast. Sunday breakfast has continually been horribly OC until the last game at which I did research. New people had begun cooking breakfast and it is typically a platter of general food like pancakes and bacon. Yogurts are put out and fruit can be available. Eggs are then made to order, but the wait staff has suddenly changed. It turns out the tavern the characters are at for breakfast has gained the name Surly's. The customers are greeted by a chipper little voice chirping out “~WelcometoSurly's~” from an unseen kitchen cook. After the mass produced foods are set out, a ~~nice~~ gentleman comes out to take individual orders. A typical (fictionalized) exchange is as follow:

“Why the f**k are you here?”

“.....what?”

“You heard me.”

“... to eat breakfast.”

“We've got eggs. What do you want?”

“I guess I will have-”

“Eggs. How the f**k do you want ‘em? We do Over Easy or Over Hard”

“Can I get Over Medium?”

“What the f**k is that s**t?”

“~Icandothat~”

“S**t”

5 minutes later the waiter returns with a plate

“I got a plate of s**t for I-don’t-give-a-f**k. I hope you choke on it.”

6. MORE THAN A GAME

"LARPing saved my life"

"A community of family and friends"

"...actually had fun..." "My free will was robbed"

"This is the first time we have been able to meet outside of game in... six years?"

"Why is the Cider gone?"

"Where else can you get away once a month for 30 bucks?"

Why does all of this Matter?

What we do is a constitutive part of who we are (Horst and Miller 2012, 4). A majority of this paper thus far has talked about LARPing, what it is, and what it may be like to play a game. But so what? Who cares? Why did I even want to do a project on this? Well, that is where we are going. Now that I have laid out some foundation on what LARPing is and what it was like for me to experience it again, I would now like to delve into all of the things that LARPing can be and can provide people.

Rehearsal for Life

Role-playing has been used in many aspects of life to act as a rehearsal. It can be used in social therapies to help people think about how they wish to respond to life problems rather than how they actually do. In elementary school, my parents had me go to a Drug-Free Club to teach me about drugs as well as other dangers. In the club, we had a tendency to role-play different skits to rehearse how to get through different situations such as strangers wanting into your house. A background in LARPing may have helped me (playing the adult stranger) get into the house a few too many times.

Regardless, role-playing can be used for rehearsal and it is no different in LARPing. Out of respect to the player who shared this example, I will be vague even though the player is unaffiliated with *The Trials of Terra Nova*. When Simon began LARPing 13 years ago, he was unsure of what he was doing. He wasn't very good at separating Simon from Sir Chengis, his half-orc knight alter ego. Rather than doing what Sir Chengis would do in social situations, he decided what he himself would do and this frustrated him. After talking to a fellow player, something clicked in Simon's head. He knew he had a backstory, but he had never thought about how the backstory would affect personality and make Sir Chengis who he really was. From there Simon really started to think everything out and rebuild who Sir Chengis was. Rather than making Sir Chengis some abstract, random character, Simon used Chengis methodically.

Unfortunately, Simon did not have a very happy childhood. He had a manipulative parent who controlled the family and the other families of the church Simon's family attended. This person ended up hurting many people. This had ramifications on how Simon interacted with peers as he grew up. Because Simon knew emotions such as pain and betrayal so well, he mimicked little Chengis's life off of his own but made it more extravagant with shamanistic magic. Then, rather than play out Sir Chengis's personality the same as Simon's due to the similar backstory, Simon turned Sir Chengis into what Simon wished he could be like after having those experiences.

Simon chose to make his alter-ego more than another skin that he could don for a weekend and forget real life. Instead, Simon turned Sir Chengis into a workout of the mind. By attempting to be this bigger, maybe better, person on a monthly basis, Simon used LARPing as a work out to flex those muscles that he wanted to be more toned. He saw that the muscles he

wanted strengthened were social muscles and he therefore used a social environment to focus in on them.

In the mundane world, to change who we are, we have to change ourselves. There is no reason why starting this process in a LARP is any different. Development of self is dependent upon action and interaction. A smoker who wishes to stop needs to do more than to want to. He must take action to stop. After having begun the process of his own will, he then needs to succeed in interacting based on those decisions. Whether that means socializing more with nonsmokers or learning how to turn down the offers or ambient temptations of smokers around him, his action must then develop into appropriate interaction. LARPing provides the same opportunities. Players can decide to try to be more assertive, stop cursing, or to listen more. By then practicing these behaviors in the social context of a LARP, they are given a miniature world to practice these actions and interactions until they become more comfortable with them to be used in the bigger, broader world.

Game or Gutter

LARPing can be very time and money consuming. Most events take up days or more likely weekends. Some games have weeklong events. It is also easy to pour money in with clothing, weapons, armor, accessories, camping gear, game fees, gas to get to games... but is this such a bad thing? Most hobbies do take some level of monetary investment and all of them take time—that is the purpose of a hobby. As long as the individual is responsible and properly prioritizes their life, it can be healthy.

But can gaming save a life? One individual I spoke to demonstrated that the answer is “yes.” He cautioned that he could be being “overdramatic”, but I believe what he described to me. Upon graduating high school, Robin was living life to the fullest or so he thought. Aspiring to tour

with a band, he worked at a Burger King during the week and partied on the weekends. Illegal activities and past times were not uncommon and were the reason to get through the week. However, he joined a coworker to an “improvisational theatre” event and ended up at a vampire Rock, Paper, Scissors LARP. Despite his experience with drugs, this was what hooked him the greatest and he was looking for his next fix at every chance he got. This became what enveloped his free time and the partying and substances became pushed out of his life. Like most addictions, one leads to another and he eventually found his worse addiction yet: the woman who would become his life.

Many people can look back to one point in their lives and pinpoint exact moments that their lives changed. LARPing was the cause of the most significant 180 degree turn for him. Do I believe that LARPing is the only thing that could have done this for him? I most certainly do not. Many activities and habits have the potential to turn a life around. For Robin, it just happened to be LARPing.

Finding a Family

One reason Robin could have been impacted by LARPing to such a degree in the long term is due to a concept known as fictive kinship. In anthropology, how a person considers how they closely relate to others can be broken down into three categories: consanguineous, affinal, and fictive. Consanguineous relationships are easiest. These are those by blood. Consanguineous relationships include a person’s parents, siblings, and the like. Affinal relationships are those concerning marriage. These include a spouse as well as in-laws who a person would consider kin due to the marriage. Fictive kinship, though, is outside both of these. Fictive kinship just... is... for some reason. Different cultures portray this differently. One personal example is that

uncle I have who is neither related to me by blood nor marriage. He just happens to be my father's best friend from childhood. However, he is still my uncle because... he is.

This is the situation I am talking about when I describe LARPing communities as having fictive kinship. By coming together and playing an intense game consistently, the group begins to feel like family. Like a sports team, the party of adventurers wins together and loses together. With all due respect to those in the military, the concept is parallel to that of soldiers in the same squad. I do not mean to equate the intensity but rather the process of growing closer due to shared trials. Continuously participating in a LARP can create these social bonds with people one might never expect to connect with.

When asked to discuss the social environment of *The Trials of Terra Nova*, veteran players described it as "A community of family and friends... I have learned to trust and depend on" and "a collection of friend circles" that "overlap". The players acknowledge that some relationships are better than others but there is a general web of connections that includes everybody. A newer player then gave the game accolades for how it interacted with new players

"The social environment is very welcoming. The people instantly accept you and let you explore your character. I built a sword and board dwarf to start out, with a fair amount of body, and the players stuck me on the front lines, no questions asked. In the video game world, the 'noobs' (new layers to a specific game or type of game) are usually put in supporting roles or something with a low impact. I really appreciated how Trials had a dive in head first mentality. The people and their characters are also very welcoming in general. They invite you to *Afters* (a meal held after the event to relax and share favorite moments), they eat with you, they talk with you."

The family mentality does not end at *Afters*. The players, when available, hangout throughout the weeks between games. Rather than seeing each other once a month and then having other friend groups, the player base becomes a large friend group on its own.

Due to job constraints, not all players are capable of interacting between games. One couple has actually been kept from between game interaction for the past six years due to a night-shift work schedule. It was not until I began my research that the schedule changed and within the first week, they already had plans to interact with other players for at least three days that week. The immediacy of interaction when available shows how close these relationships can become.

Relationships Grow and Fall

The backside of the slope when it comes to building such strong relationships within a close friend group comes when the relationships fall apart. Negative relations among friends can become distracting at a game but is not a great deterrent from play. The dissonance quickly grows, though, when more intimate relationships fall apart.

One of the players I heard a fair amount of information about that I wished to talk to for this project only made a few relatively short appearances while I was attending the game. Though a slight disappointment for me, I cannot hold anything against him when his ex-fiancé still attends the game. Jessica, the half of the relationship that still plays, has expressed that she does not wish any ill will towards him and would gladly have him still play. However, she also has no expectation for him to continue playing either. As many people know, breakups can be hard and the fallout can effect who the two members interact with in the aftermath.

Robin and his wife who met LARPing have equally expressed this sentiment. When they were still dating, the relationship did go through some rocky points. At those points, they divided the LARPs they played between them. Robin played at A while Morgan got B and C. It

can hard to be at a game where the goal is to be fun in a make believe world when someone who symbolizes the stress and problems of the mundane world is present.

Not all members of past relationships stop playing the same games though. Alice and Carla are members of Terra Nova who were in a relationship in the past but continue to play the same game with mixed results. From what I have seen, they do not majorly disrupt gameplay but there are instances where stresses can grow between them. In talking to other players, I have seen that it can affect the game. One instance of friction I have observed is a conflict of shared information.

Within the game, there are some attacks, weapons, and spells that use the Holy and Unholy descriptions. If a character is devoted to a member of the *goodly pantheon* (the group of good deities within Terra Nova), Unholy attacks effect the player. It is similar with Holy effects hurting those who worship the demon gods. During an encounter, a blast of Unholy energy radiated from a dying creature and the devout characters were riddled with pain. Among those effected were Alice and Carla. Though most players knew Alice's character was devout (wearing a large holy symbol to her god sewn on her garments), not many knew Carla's character was. Alice was taken by surprise and began to pry about who the devotion was to and Carla refused to answer. Tensions grew and volumes followed with general unease settling among the rest of the players with the impression that the question was valid but the fervor and timing of inquisition being so inappropriate as to have anOoG reason for the debate as opposed to an IG one.

Robin informed me that he tends to stay out of any OoG conflicts brought in by these two but that he does not ignore them and others he has talked to will not either. "The next time [Alice's character] gets in [Carla's character's] face, Johanne is putting [Alice's character] down.

Johanne will stabilize her, but Johanne is putting her down.” This shows that there are ramifications for letting out of game problems cross into the game. Robin realizes that he and others have no place interfering with Alice and Carla’s relationship outside of game. However, because it appears that Alice and Carla are bringing the relationship issues onto the field, Robin also realizes that Johanne has every right to react in character to the ex-couple’s characters’ actions.

Having seen the friction, I then learned from Alice and Carla about what happened on their own ends in both this debate and in general. Alice discussed with me about their relationship and described her propensity towards aggression as her character. In real life, there are greater reasons to be sedate. In a LARP, she can let herself go more and is more comfortable with generally escalating situations and meeting aggression with aggression. She did note that doing so in game has prompted her to do so more in real life (one point of conflict in the relationship and an unfortunate call back to the Rehearsal for Life) but that she is trying to rein it in. One side effect of the tendency towards aggression IG and the past issues between the two OG do lend themselves to letting IG scenarios get out of hand without realizing it. The described incident was meant completely IC but she does realize that the incident can be interpreted incorrectly and that she cannot deny that she may have reacted unconsciously as well.

When I spoke to Carla, she shed even more light on the scenario. She recognizes that she could have ended the conflict immediately by answering the question but did not because her character thinks that Alice’s character is a bully and was not going to give in to it. Carla then latter described to me reasons why this scenario became so fervid. First off, her character is stubborn and she too uses the game to healthily release aggression. Two stubborn and aggressive characters are prone to butt heads and the history can both make that worse and lead to different

interpretations of why events occurred a certain way. Additionally, Carla herself is not comfortable with religion. This has bled into her character and the choice to become devout was difficult. When Alice's character pushed an issue on this topic, everything was lined up to end rigidly.

When combined together, this whole scenario points to a single phrase: it is not that simple. Did the relationship issues in the past come into play? Probably. Were they the reason behind the encounter? Probably not. Did they influence the encounter? I honestly do not know. Simply from talking to both sides, we have to take into account two admissions of being aggressive, two of being stubborn, one of admitted discomfort about the topic, and another about blatantly not knowing if the history played a factor. It is just not that simple.

People like to separate reality and fantasy. They like to separate player and character, Josh and Ardemiya. Separating everything into nice little boxes can create a feeling of comfort and control but all of the items impact each other. The mundane world is not binary. Can we really make the mundane world binary from the fantasy or are they both aspects within reality?

A Place to Experiment (Sober Drunkenness)

When surrounded by a friend group in a make believe world, there are opportunities to do more than you typically would. I have already spoken about LARPing's potential to be used as a rehearsal, but it also provides a safe place to simply experiment with ideas. One experiment I got to be a part of was one involving alcohol. No, there was not really alcohol. Depending on the individual LARP, rules on alcohol change. Some LARPs, such as *The Trials of Terra Nova*, play at a site that does not allow alcohol on the property. Other LARPs have sites that allow it but the rules do not. Still others have no ban on its presence. No matter the LARP, most have a Bottle to Blade rule which denies the right of players to participate in combat (or even hold a

weapon), within so much time of having their last alcoholic drink. All Bottle to Blade rules I am familiar with are eight hours.

Even with these rules established on drinking at game, I got to experience a completely different encounter with the idea of alcohol. One Saturday night at game, after the night thread, a group of players came back to town and started RPin outside of the bard guild's tent. They had a gallon or two of nonalcoholic apple cider and generally hung out in character. As the night continued, onlookers would have sworn that the "non" in "nonalcoholic" might have been scrawled on in marker after the fact. Voices started to rise, giggles spread like a contagion, and sense started to take a back seat. The ultimate, penultimate, and every other question of the night became "Why's the cider gone?!?" which was asked in utter dismay.

Among the small group were a middle aged man and an under-aged participant. I cannot talk for the others because I did not talk with them about this, but for these two, drinking is not a big part of their lives or even common. The man used to drink quite a bit but now only very rarely partakes. He has not been heavily intoxicated in years. The under-aged participant has never been intoxicated in his or her life. Though this person has tried a sip here or there from parents, there is no real desire to drink as of this point in life. This leads me to ask myself: What happened that night?

This occurrence happened after midnight, probably later, after a long day at game and a night thread where they sang away the monsters (I am not sure how this worked, I was not there. However, I did hear the singing in distance and a troupe of bards said it so it must be true). The participants may have been slightly tired and they are all exceptional role-players. Building off each other and utilizing their grogginess, they had managed to build themselves into a drunken rabble in a self-induced placebo effect. What is interesting is that out of the four or five

participants, one has stayed away from the activity for years and another has never personally experienced it. The game allowed for this idea of drunkenness to be played with in a completely controlled, safe setting.

As of now, I have described this occurrence but have not included myself in with the group because I purposely did not join in. Personally, I do not approve of the idea of drunkenness and I go to great lengths to avoid inebriated individuals. Notwithstanding, here I was completely surrounded by it without a drop of alcohol on the table nor in the players' system. Not only did the LARP provide the players with the opportunity to go through the motions of intoxication to startling realism but it gave me the opportunity to be surrounded by its illusion. I was discomforted and eventually had to leave, but I was presented the opportunity that I sat through until I had to make the call to remove myself from the scenario.

Doing More Than You Thought You Could

As I described when talking about making a character, there are many things that can affect you that can impact your character. A character can't be able bodied if the player has a limp or have perfect sight if the player is blind. On the other hand, though, like avatars in computer programs, your character can still do many things that you may not be able to. These activities can include casting spells, making armor, and being a doctor. Unfortunately, because this is Live Action, there does have to be that overlap of what is physically possible to act out. The disabled still cannot walk. People with mental disabilities are not immediately "normalized" but they can be given the opportunity to stretch what they can do by being given the time and encouragement to explore what is normally too scary or threatening in the real world.

An instance of this stretching occurred during my first research game. Some new players where attending the game and were enthused to play. Despite enthusiasm, one of these players

was worried that he may not be capable of participating in an entire fight without rest due to a childhood knee injury. Though not dire, the injury did tend to act up and grow sore with overuse. This player was encouraged to participate as much as he wished and to take breaks when he saw fit. When the first combat arrived, he was active throughout the entire encounter even after slipping to the ground with a splat in the rain-conjured mud.

Having shown himself that he could fight as Reinhardt (his character), Reinhardt pushed the player to do greater things. The adventures took to the trail to find a collapsed monastery deep in the forested mountains and this search brought the players to a series of ravines they needed to cross in order to get to the monastery. I became ecstatic when I saw that we had to descend and ascend steep, muddy, leaf and snow layered slopes. Reasonably so, Reinhardt's inner player shuddered at the idea of conquering this physical challenge. He was not alone. Another player also at their first game who was a bit overweight also feared the trek with the support of the other players who did not look to the gorge with the same longing that I did. They tried to find a way around but the path to the monastery required the difficult terrain ahead. I led the way down the slopes and picked the paths back up. Having chosen my routes, I returned to the bottoms to help the two new players who shrunk from the challenge. At least, my plan was to return to the bottoms to retrieve these party members. In the end, I only had to descend part of the way to assist these players who had embraced their characters and made the phenomenal effort to attack these hills on their own to spite their fears of inability.

Will I say they went unassisted? No. To say that these new players went unassisted would be false. Equally so, to say a child learned to ride a bike without prompting or guidance would be false in most instances. Assistance was given, but the new players who thought they couldn't demonstrated that they could and only needed help in knowing how. In a following game, a

thread took the players through the worst ravine the area had to offer. One of these two players was present and excitedly jumped at the opportunity to join.

The drive to accomplish more than ones thinks they can does not stop at new players though. One type of skill a player can acquire in the game is that of a Master (insert Profession). Ordinary professions such as armorsmith, tracker, and entertainer can be bought as normal skills. To achieve a Master status, the player must buy the skill but then Quest for it. The player informs the marshal staff when bought and they then craft a quest for the charcter. The marshals craft a quest specific to the skill bought and the player doing the skill. Masters quests are about real skill and pushing the players to their limits to be the best they can be and more than they think they are.

One player whose has done this already has earned the title of Master tracker. In order to do so, first the player had to find a series of black feathers out at game over the period of months. After doing so, the character had tracked down a roc (a giant, carry-off-a-dolphin-like-rabbit sized eagle). Once there, he had to climb to the nest and retrieve an egg before it returned. In the mundane world, this meant that the player got a baby-carrier like satchel, climbed a rock climbing wall, retrieved a large egg phys. rep. from the top and put it in the carrier (while hanging onto the wall still), and descended again without breaking it. Oh yes, and he had an unknown time limit before the roc returned. He was then kicked out of a moving car on the side of the road far away from the lodge that is TN's hub and told "good luck making it back to camp before the roc finds you." He had another unknown time limit to find his way back to the IG town without a map or use of roads. Along the way, he found a bonus objective and effectively hunted a boar IC. He returned with only a handful of minutes to spare.

There were safety measures employed throughout the whole process but this is the difficulty in the quests. They push the player's limits and make her better for it. The Master Tracker is now on his second Masters quest to become a Master Hunter/Trapper and I was fortunate enough to be invited to watch the player's victory in one portion of it.

Another player has spent the XP to become a Master Entertainer and is awaiting the first part of his quest. The marshals are finishing up the preparations for this. Aside from planning what they want, they also need to receive permissions from outside authorities to hold the quests that are not on property. Afterall, it might not end well to shove a man and his mandolin into an Irish pub and tell him to earn one hundred bucks by closing if he is just going to be thrown out of the establishment. No matter the quest, though, the player has something to get out of it.

There is a Limit

Although there are many points of players being thankful for pushing, this is not always the case. A previous veteran marshal was notorious for pushing and pushing and pushing for better or worse. In one instance, she pressured the players into completing a risky physical challenge against a spouse's wishes. The spouse knows their significant other will accept almost any challenge if pushed enough and the spouse asked the veteran marshal not to push the matter if unsuccessful with the first offer of the challenge. The senior marshal has since, nigh immediately, gone against those wishes.

Yes, the marshal has pushed for good but also bad. She has in the past been hurting those players that have physical disabilities and has driven off many people who had come to the game that was sold to them as a Hub based game. After beginning to play the game, the Hub-based game was transformed into spending great amounts of time on the trail and much more time than

is promoted for any specific thread. In one instance, the disabled players were promised that it was going to be a one hour trail and it ended up being four hours before they returned.

In another instance, the marshal forced a disabled player to partake in a quest against his will. I managed to contact this player outside of the game. I found him through another player who was not currently playing as well. This contact had another game related activity he could do and wanted to do. When heading out to do so, the veteran marshal approached the player and physically turned him around and prevented him from going the way he wished. When he tried to continue, the marshal used the magic words of “You are compelled to go this way”.

Now, these words may not mean much to a layperson, but to a player they are equivalent to a threat in this circumstance. Marshals run the plot of a game. When a marshal says that a character is “compelled” to do something, there is nothing the player can do. A compulsion is defined as an uncontrollable behavior such as those done by person with Tourette’s syndrome. When a marshal says this, he is indicating that there is some supernatural force creating this compulsion for your character. It is akin to a declaration of “if you are going to play this game and play your character, you WILL do this. You as a player have no choice.” When this incident was described to me, the player said, “My free will was robbed.”

Having broached this subject with long term players, I was informed that “TN has a very high quit rate” and it is easy for me to understand why once I began to hear the individual stories and reasons for leaving. When publicizing to prospective players, I hear things such as “we are continuously growing every month.” I question this statement. I have seen a maximum of maybe thirty to thirty five players at the largest events. With over fifty held events since the founding of *The Trials of Terra Nova* (by my math), thirty players does not show continuous

growth. It may show a high turnover rate and an ability to keep from shrinking when players stop coming but I do not believe it shows growth.

The Growth of the Character and of the Person

“What is striking is that gamers do not consciously use their own experiences in this way for a game... if writers write what they know, gamers play what they watch or read. Gaming is therefore an overt conscious intertextual effort.”(Holcomb 2000, 20-21)

I have found this analysis within a dissertation on role-playing games by Jack Holcomb. I agree and disagree with different parts of this. I agree that we play what we read and watch. However, I very much play what I know and use my own experience. This disconnect may be because Holcombe is mainly talking about table-top games where I have more LARP experience. Additionally, my characters are very personal where other players may do what they think would be “cool” or “powerful” in context of the game. For me, playing should not be a continuous effort. It should only be an effort when exploring new parts of yourself through your character. Given time, though, I do believe that players will transfer from one play style to the other. I interviewed a player whose character progression has shown this.

Sayf started out as a concept of the dashing hedonistic rogue. His name was generated from old Arabic as “The Despicable Son of the Fire King”. The character is far more hedonistic than the player could ever condone in real life. When asked if playing something that he doesnot agree with is a hard task, the player replied that it is “quite the opposite”. He continued by explaining, “I like gaming because I can play it out without consequence. [It’s] not a need [for me] but it is part of the character.” The point of interest for me, and why I bring this character up, is because this is how the character started. Through years of playing, the character has grown and changed. He is still extremely hedonistic (no changing that), but the character’s

priorities and point of view on the world have changed. Though still self-serving, he now accepts his role and responsibilities in the caravan. The best way to show this is to look again at the character's name. Indeed, it does mean "The Despicable son of the Fire King" in ancient Arabic (as far as I have been informed), but when the player asked a friend who speaks Arabic to translate it from modern Arabic, the name means "Sword – son of- the chief of healers". The modern Sayf is still his political, business-savvy self, but he is more. He, when needed, is the arm of those good adventures that can do what they themselves cannot or will not do. He "can't just act like evil is ok." The character has been influenced by the player's own views and values as well as in-game experience. Sayf was meant to be a background character because the player is used to being looked to for leadership in everyday life. "People have described [the player] as their rock," and, when in that position, I can understand wanting to relax in a game and not be the leader. Unfortunately, the two worlds are not separated and things like confidence and charisma transfer over easily. It only took time until he was looked to for help again.

People play role-playing games to have fun, be someone they could never be, and do things that are impossible either due to their life or because the laws of physics get in the way. What we see here, though, is that despite being able to be anything he wants and even trying to be extremely different from himself, this player has slowly become himself again. I have heard people talk about things like "your actions define you", "you show your colors at your testing point", and other clichés. What I see, though, is that when someone truly believes their actions do not matter, when everything can be excused because "it's just a game," that is when they see who they are. I do not mean this as a constant. Just because someone plays a bully for a few hours does not mean he is a bully. Rather, over the long term, when you try to be a self-centered, shadowy figure with an affinity to lip-service, is that who you stay? Or does that slowly drop

away because it is not natural to you? By trying to be someone else, you can show who you really are.

The Scales of Success

As has been shown, who you are as a person can change who your character is. If we turn this around, can the character change you? This section began with how a player deliberately chose to use their character for self-improvement but can that accidentally happen? Does the character, someone people think of as just imaginary, effect its creator in the real world? Danny Than (The Minstrel) believes so.

I entitle this player The Minstrel because the player has been LARPing for fifteen years and has played a bard, or minstrel, in seven different LARPs. It is quite common to find bards and performers at LARPs and they often play and sing music. However, most of the music played at all of the LARPs I have heard of is generally the same. Many of the songs are taken from European folk music and Irish pub songs. I am confident that I could go to a LARP in the United States and be able to sing along to a majority of the songs if they were performed all evening. The Minstrel noticed this too and got tired of singing the same songs every other bard was singing. The Minstrel wanted to sing his own songs and be a real bard instead of a repeated record. Unfortunately, Danny was not a good enough player to write his own music. Over the course of a year or two, Danny seriously practiced playing his mandolin and understanding it. He contacted the professional pirate musicians *The Dread Crew of Oddwood* and consulted them on song writing and performing. Eventually, Danny got good enough to write his own songs and has begun performing them. According to Danny, he progressed more as a musician in the past year than he has in all of his past years combined.

The Minstrel's effect on Danny's life is not limited to him solely being a better player. When writing a new song for multiple instruments, Danny needed to record multiple parts at the same time to share the music with fellow bards at another LARP. Danny had his musically multi-talented son play with him and develop a percussion part to go with the acoustic strings. At the end of the jam/recording session, the son said that he had actually had fun doing it because his dad was good enough to play with now. What sounds like a back handed compliment ended up swelling Danny's heart in love and justified self-pride because his accomplishments were being recognized and he could bond with his son in an activity that had long been out of reach.

An improvement of size such does not have to wait fifteen years. At *The Trials of Terra Nova*, Danny has a young apprentice who is quite a good singer as well as harp and recorder player. Soon after beginning to play her character, she started writing her own music too because Danny showed her that it was an option. One character being fed up with being a copy ended up improving the player, presenting the player a new opportunity with his son, and gave another player a new hobby to explore.

Tolkien's Four Characteristics of LARP

Having studied LARPing rather intently after studying fantasy literature and conterminously with fairy tales, I have seen many aspects of where the criticisms and theories can align. When studying the fantasy and fairy tale genera, a popular name to run across is that of J.R.R. Tolkien. Aside from writing such works as *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* and being a large influence on modern fantasy, he was also one of the first known critics of contemporary fantasy and fairy tales. A major contribution Tolkien made to the criticism of the genera is what is known as Tolkien's Four Characteristics of Faerie. For Tolkien, he required any work of faerie to contain: Fantasy, Escape, Recovery, and Consolation (Tolkien 1983).

Fantasy entails that which is magical and supernatural to mundane life. Escape requires that the media provide some means of separating the consumer from reality, even if momentarily, from the mundane (or primary as he calls it) world. Recovery demands that the consumer return to the world with a new view on life having recovered some of the magic and wonder in the mundane world (Tolkien 1983). The typical example given by C. S. Lewis and repeated by faerie scholars and critics is that after visiting a magic forest in a book, the reader returns not disappointed that the forest in his back yard is not magic but bright-eyed at the potential that it could be. The forest holds wonder waiting to be seen.

The final characteristic required is Consolation and this consolation is typically that of the eucatastrophe. Eucatastrophe is an uncommon word specifically coined by Tolkien and it is basically the good rapid and dramatic change of events. This can be seen as the hero slaying the dragon, the maiden saved, the wedding whisked off to, and the dragon's horde gone to the poor. Like a hurricane or earthquake, the world is suddenly and immediately changed but for the better.

When applying Tolkien's characteristics to LARPing, fantasy can be rather self-evident in a fantasy LARP. This requirement can also be seen rather easily in science fiction LARPS as well as Horror and possibly even dystopian ones. I admit that it does fall short in LARPs outside of these categories but not everything can dovetail beautifully. The real similarities occur after this point.

When talking to people about why they LARP, it is only a matter of time before escape is brought up. I have provided a series of answers to the question "Whydo you LARP?" (Appendix D) but I can assure you that escape is there multiple times whether the term is specifically used or simply described. There is one player I spoke to that holds strongly to this concept though.

Riley has troubles at home at the moment. Divorces can be more than enough for anyone. The stress of having a child graduate from school is another time that parents look too with pride and dread. The combination of these two can be a misery of uncertainty. When I asked Riley to explain the choice to LARP, the response was simple: "Where else can you get away once a month for 30 bucks?" Vacation: LARPing just happens to function as a weekend vacation. A short day or weekend away from life can allow a person to recuperate and face life with renewed strength. LARPing allows for this to happen. There are players that participate in many games but each of them only occurs at specific times. Even for avid LARPers, they do have a life between games and they take care of their responsibilities.

Additionally, there is a difference between escape and running away. One player currently has a tragedy occurring in her life. She has been playing for a year and absolutely loves it. However, her newborn nephew has recently been diagnosed with an immunodeficiency disorder. She has been forward about this with the other players and explained that she cannot play for a while during this period in her life. She is devoting all of her time and energy into her family, whether that means directly spending time with them or working more and spending less so she can help ease the financial stress that comes with serious illness. LARPing is not a place to run and hide. Rather, it is a place for support. In response to the player's openness, many people comforted her, kept her in their prayers, and even donated money to help.

Recovery is something that I cannot generalize for everyone because it is a characteristic that is personal. It impacts how each player reacts to the experience and I will therefore share my own. I have been fortunate enough to have the opportunity to travel to South Africa for an ecology class. While there, I was able to experience savannahs, tropical forests, a coast on the Indian Ocean, and much more. I saw exotic plants and animals. Above all, I saw adventure. I

saw journeys. I saw tribal totems and heard the dangers of monsters that did not exist. Where some people's recovery occurs only by making the mundane magical again, mine is that and much more. Having LARPed for years, the new terrain was much more than what the field guides said it was. My mind did not limit the world to what a book bought off the internet said was real. Everything was real until I found evidence against it (and unlike the difficulty for some people to prove that dragons exist, it is extremely hard to prove that they do not exist in someplace new and full of wonder).

Finally, consolation exists in a LARP because it has to exist there. A single event may not end on a high note. The players may experience turmoil and dismay. In the end, though, eucatastrophe will occur. If the story remains pessimistic despite all of the struggles of the players, discouragement will set in and players will leave. I do not mean to say that there will always be a happy ending for every thread but it cannot always be doom and gloom. The players exist to make a difference in the world and the eucatastrophe is what shows this to be true. By the nature of writing a compelling story for the players to influence and change, consolation is provided as a possibility.

While I was playing, a major point of eucatastrophe occurred. Wrapping up more than a year of story, the event of The Harrowing took place at a special event called the Corn Maze All-Nighter (titled so because the game is one whole night rather than a weekend and it takes place at a corn maze). The quest ended a large plot line and was meant as a cathartic release for the long time players as well as an exciting event for the new players who came to the special game to try it out.

Parallel to van Gennep's Rites of Passage

Having made connections of LARPing to Tolkien's four characteristics would be pointless if I did not bring it around full circle. In completion of the circle, I would like to talk about the rites of passage described by the folklorist and ethnographer Arnold van Gennep. Rites of passage are celebrations that occur when an individual within a culture leaves one group and comes into a new one. A common time for these is when a child grows enough to transition into adult hood. Within Van Gennep's rites of passage, there are three phases: separation, liminality, and incorporation. Rites of separation occur when an individual leaves a group. Rites of liminality occur in the transitional zone where the individual is in limbo between groups. Rites of incorporation occur as the individual returns to the population as a member of the new group.

Though rudimentary, I will break this down into a stereotypical and historically inaccurate image of Gronk's, a caveman's, coming of age story. When Gronk grows old enough to be considered a man, his mother gives him his first hair cut with a flint flake and he is sent out into the wilds on his own. These are his rites of separation. Gronk then must survive the winter on his own. He has to make his own weapons, find his own food, and generally not die. These are Gronk's rites of liminality. Finally, Gronk returns to Ma, Pa, little Suzy, and Aunt Judith. He has survived the winter, is stronger and smarter for it, and has a new head of hair. Having returned, he is now a man and the family invite over all of the neighboring and warring families to share in a big celebration and eat a whole mammoth. These are Gronk's Rites of Incorporation.

An understanding of both Tolkien's characteristics and Van Gennep's phases of rites can create a combined way of looking at LARPing. The fantasy elements of LARPing provides a separation from the world and a distancing of self. The escape then acts a liminal zone where a

person can grow as neither their old self nor as who they could become. Tolkien's recovery is then a reincorporation into the world as a new self with a new understanding and view on life. The consolation and eucatastrophe of the story in a LARP provides the celebration typical of rites of incorporation.

The first step of separation is deciding to attend a LARP and to do so with an open and willing mind. Creating a character, arriving at the event, and checking-in can be thought of the rites of separation. Physically leaving the surroundings of mundane life and then mentally entering a shared imaginary world separating a person from their life allows for the opportunity to change. Simply playing the game allows for the liminal stage to occur. Experiencing, interacting, thinking, and taking action create a subconscious dialogue. Without deliberately needing to, a player can make discoveries, connections, and bonds during this liminal stage and their views can change. At the end of an event, the player has undergone an unknown number of micro-transformations. The player cannot see these micro-transformations within themselves but can see them in how he views the world and those around him. This is the recovery and the rites of incorporation. The celebration of victory in one form or another and the feeling of having made a difference as a part of a group is what then brings the player back again the next month.

7. COMING TO A CLOSE

Though not usually as drastic as a one-time event, a continued hobby of LARPing can provide a series of separations, changes, and incorporations back into life that create a cumulative effect to change a person. Whether it is when LARPing is used as a rehearsal for life to change how one acts, changes the course of a life, provides a new family, changes how you see the world or how you see yourself, gives you a new goal of what you want to be or do, or even gives you a better understanding of who you or someone else really is, LARPing provides a shift in the life of its players. One weekend a month can pile on the changes that create a new life.

What is viewed by the general public a hobby can be much more. When separated into real life and make believe, LARPing is just a game. When the binary is discarded and LARPing is viewed as a part of the player's life and who the player is, LARPing becomes a lens to see the player. Rather than a hobby, it is an avocation. It becomes a series of opportunities. It becomes an awareness of self and of others.

Is LARPing just a game? No. Yes. Maybe. The problem with this question is that the question requires a binary answer. Yes, LARPing is just a game for the little kid simply playing make believe. Yes, LARPing is just a game for the adult simply wanting to go fight with foam swords as aggressive exercise just the same as football with its tackling and team versus team mentality. But NO. LARPing is not just a game. LARPing is not just a game for the man who had his life saved by, met his wife through it, and now has a whole new family to bond with over it. No, LARPing is not just a game for the man who was pushed by it to learn to be a better musician and can now bond with his son because of it. No, LARPing is not just a game for the man who learned that he is not defined by a childhood injury. No, LARPing is not just a game

for the women who lived their relationship through it to and past its end and now know themselves better for it. No, LARPing is not just a game for the player who is using the character to make themselves into a stronger person.

How I Felt Doing the Project

For the most part, this project was one of joy. Most areas of stress occurred at the beginning as I learned as a first time researcher of the process of applying for research approval. The hurry up and wait process of getting approval from owners and site coordinators before getting revisions from the governmental research agencies was a necessary learning process.

On the other hand, learning the process of research was also wonderful. Having been in many laboratory science classes, I am used to the ideology of “We are entering the lab on Friday at noon and doing X, Y, and Z and finishing between 2 and 2:30”. With social science, I got to deal with people and what life entails. My last interview to finish the paper was an hour away and scheduled for the evening of the second time the Rough Draft of the thesis was due. People are people. They have lives. As a researcher working on a social subject, you learn that these lives being studied are full and the research is valuable because it helps understand them, if even in just one sliver of it.

Once true research began, most frustrations occurred over differences between expectations of play and the realities of the focus group. Playing the game was a joy for the most part. I got to develop relationships with spectacular people. I hope they know who they are. Playing once again after years away provided new eyes for the research but also new eyes for the world and a new start of the activity for me.

Talking to players outside of the game allowed for very human moments. The interviewees spoke freely about themselves and their views. They trusted and made themselves vulnerable.

Some of my favorite moments were when players would politely ask me not write something they were about to say down. Rather than try to hide something from the project, it became a motion of “I want to tell you this as a person and as a friend as opposed to tell you because I think the paper needs it.” Reading surveys was equally rewarding because it gave me the opportunity to see the passion these players have both for the game and for each other when I had not the opportunity to meet with every person individually. There were many times that I became jittery with excitement as I read responses to the simplest of questions.

As the project came to a close, there was a wave of awe and sadness. This project was not only the culmination of my undergraduate career but also the end result of a maintained interest within a genre throughout life. On the other side of this, the project helped foster a connection with multiple of the participants which I am learning how to handle. As I described within the paper, a LARPing group can form a family. When I asked the players to treat me like any other player, they did so and welcomed me in. To heighten this process, many of the participants within the player base were honest and vulnerable with me when sharing their stories and views. This mental and emotional openness accelerated the perceived inclusion into the group. The closure of the project signaled the end of known interaction with the players and the beginning of the unknown after graduation.

8. FOR FURTHER STUDY

Within this study, I focused on explaining LARPing to a general audience and providing a preliminary breakdown of a few different roles LARPing can play in the lives of its players. In addition to expanding on these topics, I also identified multiple of other topics I did not have the time nor resources to begin to explain. Some of these topics are explained below but require their own projects to properly address.

Continuing with the idea of identity, anthropologists may wish to examine the role LARPing has in the lives of minorities. One player I spoke to addressed the topic of an apparent greater number of transgender individuals and individuals in transition from one sex to another. They briefly spoke about how LARPing with these people has changed how he relates with transgendered individuals. In addition to this, he also recognized the same change in view occur with Islamic immigrants that he has played with in the past year as well. Is there a more accepting community among LARPers for minorities? Does playing social games of lucid identity effect how players view those of differing mundane identity?

Found in multiple of the LARPs I have been exposed to via surveys and personal experience, romantic relationships extend beyond the normative monogamous bipartite pairing. Deviances from this include polyamory and triads. In addition to these is also the possibility of having a “monogamous” mundane life but being in an In-Game relationship with another player solely within the game. These relationships can range from being purely IC and story driven to participants sharing sleeping arrangements such as personal cabins, tents, or beds for the LARP event but not beyond.

The concept of money also has the potential for further study. The economics of paying to play, where the money goes, and how the money is used can also be explored. Additionally, the

use of mundane money for In-Game profit is also available such as buying bottles of root beer at the store then selling them in a game for coin. Researchers could then also explore the use of In-Game money such as copper, silver, and gold pieces or whatever money system used in a given LARP and how it mirrors or strays from mundane economics and finances. Entirely virtual money can also be explored. *The Trials of Terra Nova* use Experience Points and Veteran Points as player rewards and a means of character development. The use, saving, and trading of these virtual monies could be related to those of things such as Bit Coin, CoD points in the *Call of Duty* franchise, and money within the worlds of computer and smart phone apps.

Finally, there are still many conflicts with LARPing that exist that can be investigated. As this project began, a new issue arose with the company of Global Archery suing LARP.org. Global Archery is the company that owns the brand Archery Tag. In a supposed skirmish to monopolize the sales of foam-tipped arrows in the United States, the company began the process of suing an importer of German arrows designed for LARPing. Though not completely settled at the time of writing, the law suit does seem to be receding in charges. This is merely one example of threats to aspects of LARPing that continue to slowly arise for the hobby and it would be interesting to see if the threats are related or arise upon separate grounds.

9. APPENDICES

Appendix A: Glossary of Terms

There are multiple uncommon terms and abbreviations used by LARPers and I have used them throughout the paper. Here I have provided my definitions for the terms for reference. Some terms are applicable to many games while others are specific to one or two.

Afters- A meal held after a *The Trials of Terra Nova* event where players can eat together and share thoughts about the past weekend.

Amtgard- A LARP with chapters spread around the United States that focuses on fighting.

At Game-A phrase to indicate being at a LARP event

Boffer- weapons used in some LARPs made of foam around a solid core. This can refer to homemade weapons or commercially available weapons made from pressed foam and latex. Some LARPs will refer to all foam weapons as boffers while others will separate the commercial items under a different term such as “Latex Weapons”

Come Along- A call a strong character can make to simulate carrying someone else when one or both players do not wish to engage in the activity or when it is unsafe to do so.

Character (alter ego) - A person within the game world similar to a character in a novel, play, or movie. These are typically portrayed by a single player but may also be multiple players together to form a large creature or even simply referred to and never seen.

Character Sheet- The physical or digital document outlining a character’s race, class, culture, known skills, and available Experience Points and Veteran Points.

Coin- A phrase used to refer to In-Game money that a character uses in fantasy LARPs. New LARPs typically use plastic money while established LARPs buy different colored

metal coins. The exact money and conversion rates change based on each game but copper coins, silver coins, and gold coins. In *The Trials of Terra Nova*, the primary money units are a silver kestrel (a silver coin) and the gold falcon (a gold coin). One gold falcon equals thirty silver kestrels.

Encounter- A specific challenge, activity, or Role-Play opportunity provided by the marshals to the players either as a general danger, development of plot, or possible reward or temptation.

Experience Points (XP) - The points a player earns by playing his character that can be used to permanently enhance his character. They may be able to be traded to other players depending on the game.

Game Marshal (GM) - The head Marshal responsible for running the game and overseeing all other marshals.

Game On/ Lay On- The call that follows a HOLD in which the players continue their actions where they left before reacting to whatever new occurrence has become apparent.

Grade- in *The Trials of Terra Nova*, some skills can be bought multiple times for the same character. The Grade is how many times the character has bought it. Most skills that have multiple grades go up to 6 grades.

Hit Points- the amount of health a character has. Negative hit points means a player is dying and bleeding out. During this time the character is losing Hit Points until they reach -10 and are dead.

HOLD- A call in encounters where the players must freeze their actions. This can be used as an opportunity for exposition, explaining the effect of a spell or ability, or for safety concerns.

Hub- A central location within a LARP that acts as the center of gameplay.

In Character (IC) - The action taken or words spoken were from the point of view of a character within the LARP. These action can actually have taken place or symbolized having taken place. In the scenario of playing a game of Rock, Paper, Scissors to determine if a player disarmed a trap, In Character, the character either disarmed the trap or set it off on accident.

In Game (IG) - Similar to IC, these actions occur within the game world but apply to much more than a single character's point of view. For example, an NPC playing a Grave Knight walks somewhere in an orange hat on representing he is not there. He then takes it off and is there in play when the NPC describes the Grave Knight bursting from the ground in a shower of soil. IG, the Grave Knight burst from the ground out of nowhere with no warning.

Marshal- A player who acts as a referee, rules interpreter, NPC coordinator, plotline creator and game manager. Marshals can be general roles or specific to a role, such a Monster Marshal, Magic Marshal, or Fighter Marshal. Other possible marshals are Fire Marshals who control the fires for cooking and Health Marshals who are responsible for responding to injuries and illnesses prior to outside aid if necessary.

Non-Player Character (NPC) - A side character within the story controlled by the marshal staff. These can be quest givers, merchants, monsters, natural environment dangers, and anything else needed to be portrayed within the game world outside of structures.

Out of Character (OC or OoC) - These words or actions are taken place as the player. This can include talking about movies while at game. In the scenario of playing a game of Rock, Paper, Scissors to determine if a player disarmed a trap, Out of Character, the player won, lost, or tied in the game of Rock, Paper, Scissors.

Out of Game (OG of OoG) - Actions taken by players that do not occur in the game world that must be done due to either mundane needs to allow for effects to occur in game. For example, an NPC playing a Grave Knight walks somewhere in an orange hat on representing he is not there. He then takes it off and is there in play when the NPC describes the Grave Knight bursting from the ground in a shower of soil. OG, the person playing the Grave Knight had to walk to where he would appear. This does not occur within the game world and the characters should not react to the person walking there.

Physical Representation (Phys. Rep.)-An item or prop that is used to symbolize an item within the game. This can be an actual suit of armor that is what it is or a glow stick used to represent a glowing orb of fire floating in the air.

Player- A person who plays or runs from within a given LARP, no matter their role in it.

Player Character (PC)- A character within the game that belongs to a player and acts as a protagonist to the story

Player versus Player (PvP)- A LARP play style where the primary center of conflict is between player characters.

Player versus Environment (PvE)- A LARP play style where the primary center of conflict is between the player characters and their environment as portrayed by non-player characters.

Plot- the general storyline running through the game developed by the marshals and reacted to by the players.

Role-Play/Role-playing (RP)- The idea or act of portraying a character.

Stabilize- To stop a character from bleeding out and dying after unconscious. The character ceases to take damage but are not healed back to consciousness.

Thread or Trail – A general term for a quest, mission, job, or adventure where the players leave the lodge for a series of encounters to further plot.

Trials of Terra Nova, The- A high fantasy LARP held in central Indiana. This is the LARP this paper focuses on. It is abbreviated by the players as “Trials”, “Nova”, “Terra Nova”, “TN”, and “ToTN.”

Upkeep- This is an action that can be taken in *The Trials of Terra Nova* to maintain items such as weapons and armor that would theoretically become worn down over time.

Upkeeping an item with coin each month is significantly cheaper than buying a new one or hoping to find another copy of the item on an enemy.

Veteran Points (VP or Veeps)- Points that can be used to unlock additional options within *The Trials of Terra Nova* or buy temporary bonuses for your character. They can be traded to other players.

Waterborn- A playable race within *The Trials of Terra Nova* that is a humanoid turtle. It is slow moving but sturdy.

Were-Were's are a playable race within *the Trials of Terra Nova*. They can either be bears, cats, or wolves. They can shift between their fully animal form and a humanoid form that functions like a human but still has characteristics like fur, muzzles, and whiskers to appear animalistic.

Appendix B: Survey

This is the survey that I employed to gain a wealth of information from players quickly. By using a survey, I could receive this data without disturbing game play and it allowed the players to answer at their own pace. After receiving a survey from a TN player, I could then know better what to watch for and talk to that player about. The survey also allowed for LARPerS from across the Midwest and East Coast to hear about the project and easily participate if they had the proper amount of experience to use as an expert testimony.

LIVING VICARIOUSLY THROUGH YOURSELF: AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF LARPING SURVEY

Hello,

This survey is a part of a independent study being performed through the Department of Anthropology at Ball State University for the creation of an honors senior thesis. The goal of the project is to produce a paper describing the researcher's experience in taking part in the activity of Live Action Role Playing and the impacts the activity has on the lives of the players. The project will focus on the activity's use as a virtual world and its influence on personal identity.

To participate in this survey, you must be of 18 years of age or older and either:

- A.) Be a member of the Trials of Terra Nova or
- B.) Possess at least 10 years of experience in Live Action Role Playing

Additionally, a consent form must be signed for your answers to be included in this study. One can be provided for you if you have not had the opportunity to sign one. Please contact the Primary Investigator listed at the bottom of the page.

You may skip any question you do not wish to answer or stop this survey at any point. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact the Primary Investigator:

Joshua Sullivan
Department of Anthropology
Ball State University
Muncie, IN 47306
Email: [REDACTED]

Name: _____

For participant confidentiality, all players will be assigned a pseudonym. If you wish to provide your own, you may.

Preferred Pseudonym: _____

Mundane Demographic Information: This information is to provide the researcher with a grasp of the characteristics of the player base.

Age:

1. 18-29
2. 30-39
3. 40-49
4. 50+

Education:

1. Some high school
2. High school graduate
3. Associate's degree or Certification
4. Bachelor's degree
5. Master's degree
6. Doctorate

Current Occupation: _____

LARPing Experience: This information is to provide the researcher with a view of your history as a LARPer and your general level of applied knowledge.

How long have you been LARPing? _____

Where have you LARPed?

What managerial roles have you performed such as marshal positions, logistic and secretarial roles, rules writing and system editing?

What achievements have you earned in character such as titles, honors, and uncommon accomplishments? Why are they important?

In- Game Demographics: This information is to provide the researcher with a quick view of the characters played within "The Trials of Terra Nova". Participants who do not have a character in the game may either skip this section or may use it to share a character from another game.

This character is played in this game world: _____

Character Name: _____

Character Race: _____

Character Culture: _____

Character Class and Elite Class _____

Ethos: _____

Please provide a basic description of who your character is:

Research questions: These questions seek to examine how you interact with your character and the possible reciprocal influences between you and your character.

What are a few of the key character traits that your character is based upon (e.g. Honesty, Power, Freewill) or qualities that they possess (e.g. follows a code or creed, will rob fellow players, has an issue with authority)? Please elaborate on why your character holds these traits in high regard.

How do you as a person view these character traits? Do you hold the same views of them? Do aspire to them or are they absent from your day to day life?

How do you see how you identify as a person affecting your in-game persona?

How do you see your in-game persona affecting your real life identity?

Is your character influenced by books, movies, or other sources? How so?

What are the responsibilities of playing a Non-Player Character?

How does playing a Non-Player Character differ from playing your own character?

Do you enjoy playing Non-Player Characters? Why or why not?

Why do you LARP?

How do you "win" in a LARP, i.e., what makes a specific weekend a success for you?

Please describe the social environment of "The Trials of Terra Nova".-

Please use this space to address anything else that you may wish.

Thank you for completing this survey. If you have any questions about the research being collected or the project in general, please do not hesitate to ask. Additionally, if you wish to provide any further information, you may contact the primary investigator at [REDACTED]. If you wish to set up an interview to discuss your answers or other aspects of LARPing, please leave your preferred form of contact below. Once again, thank you for your participation.

Preferred contact means: _____

Appendix C: Sample Survey Response

This is a sample survey that I have made. I have answered my own survey in a form that has mimicked the ways in which the true participants answered the questions. This is to give readers unfamiliar with LARPing a brief idea of how the survey would be answered. Additionally, this provides the participants with reciprocal knowledge about me for having shared their own answers.

LIVING VICARIOUSLY THROUGH YOURSELF: AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF LARPING SURVEY

Name: Joshua Sullivan

For participant confidentiality, all players will be assigned a pseudonym. If you wish to provide your own, you may.

Preferred Pseudonym: Milo

Mundane Demographic Information: This information is to provide the researcher with a grasp of the characteristics of the player base.

Age:

- 5. 18-29 X
- 6. 30-39
- 7. 40-49
- 8. 50+

Education:

- 7. Some high school
- 8. High school graduate X
- 9. Associate's degree or Certification
- 10. Bachelor's degree
- 11. Master's degree
- 12. Doctorate

Current Occupation: Senior Honors Student at BSU

LARPing Experience: This information is to provide the researcher with a view of your history as a LARPer and your general level of applied knowledge.

How long have you been LARPing? On and off for 15 years

Where have you LARPed? Amtgard in NW Indiana, Kanarak and Broken Circle in Northern IN, and The Trials of Terra Nova

What managerial roles have you performed such as marshal positions, logistic and secretarial roles, rules writing and system editing? I have Been a junior marshal for one LARP I have also acted as a sound board for working out rules for a second LARP.

What achievements have you earned in character such as titles, honors, and uncommon accomplishments? Why are they important? No exact titles. For my first character I played in a LARP, I completed a few quests to earn the right to be a ranger. I was also pivotal in a storyline versus a death knight (against my desires).

In- Game Demographics: This information is to provide the researcher with a quick view of the characters played within "The Trials of Terra Nova". Participants who do not have a character in the game may either skip this section or may use it to share a character from another game.

This character is played in this game world: The Trials of Terra Nova

Character Name: Ardemiyen Florescence

Character Race: Elf

Character Culture: Floren

Character Class and Elite Class Cleric of the Trickster

Ethos: Chaotic Good :)

Please provide a basic description of who your character is:

Ardemiyen is an absent minded entertainer. He prefers performing for kids, whether that is due a lack of skill to impress adults or if he just enjoys that level of audience better. He has recently become the steward (Stewert) of a bard guild to give him something better to do with his time.

Research questions: These questions seek to examine how you interact with your character and the possible reciprocal influences between you and your character.

What are a few of the key character traits that your character is based upon (e.g. Honesty, Power, Freewill) or qualities that they possess (e.g. follows a code or creed, will rob fellow players, has an issue with authority)? Please elaborate on why your character holds these traits in high regard.

Ardemiyen is built off of my love of learning new skills, tricks, and stunts. He is also oblivious to what he doesn't feel like knowing or want to know. He is less caring than I am on purpose. I care too

much. He can feel emotions but he doesn't always recognize that others feel emotions unless they impact him in some way.

How do you as a person view these character traits? Do you hold the same views of them? Do aspire to them or are they absent from your day to day life?

I greatly enjoy learning skills and that is something that makes the character fun. Obliviousness is something that I both hate and envy. I think it is a negative character trait but I do wish I could be more oblivious to the world. I also am socially stunted and don't always realize what my words mean to other people. It has caused me problems in the past. –

How do you see how you identify as a person affecting your in-game persona?

Ardemiyenis much of what I am not. He puts himself out there and openly addresses people in inconvenient ways. He will walk through conversations to talk to someone else and then loop back to the first group as if nothing happened.

I am exceedingly introverted and that has caused me to create a character that is not. Every major character trait he has was found by looking at what I am not. Needless to say, he is exhausting for me to play and I occasionally have to take breaks from myself.

How do you see your in-game persona affecting your real life identity?

Ardemiyen is allowing me to try to be more confident and outgoing in real life. I don't know if it is working but the idea is there.

Is your character influenced by books, movies, or other sources? How so?

I did not decide who he was based on a template but rather a mishmash of ideas floating in my head. Looking back and considering what others have told me, I can see that Ardemiyen is a combination of a flighty Johnny Depp Willy Wonka and Captain Jack Sparrow. Ardemiyen is also greatly based on Renaissance Fair Performers that I look up to: MooNiE the Magnif'Cent, Broon, Gypsy Geoff, Adam Crack, and Thomas Wood.

What are the responsibilities of playing a Non-Player Character?

To be the world. To provide story. To be a target and a threat.

How does playing a Non-Player Character differ from playing your own character?

Being an NPC is a trial for many personalities and roles. Rather than focusing on progressing yourself, you are progressing the world. Progressing plot is great, but filling the world in with detail is more important.

Do you enjoy playing Non-Player Characters? Why or why not?

I enjoy fighting as an NPC but I prefer to RP as my character. I can really get in character as an NPC with head notice (even just 30 minutes) but I do not like to random stranger X for 5 minutes than changing. If I am going to RP as an NPC, I want to be someone.

Why do you LARP?

I have LARPed since I was 7. I enjoy it for the same reason kids enjoy playing sports or video games: it is what I do. I understand it and am comfortable with it. I enjoy the genre and it allow me to interact with the genre on an intimate level.

How do you "win" in a LARP, i.e., what makes a specific weekend a success for you?

You play. Nothing more, nothing less. You go out and play. If I forget about Josh and Josh's problems for hours at a time, I won.

Please describe the social environment of "The Trials of Terra Nova". The members are extremely friendly with each other. They act like a big circle of friends with little cliques within it, but that will always happen. The game is welcoming if you come with the right attitude/mindset and the players are in a good mood. Everyone has off days.

Please use this space to address anything else you may wish:

I wonder if anybody has actually read this. If possible, let me know if you did. Code word: Cucumber

Thank you for completing this survey. If you have any questions about the research being collected or the project in general, please do not hesitate to ask. Additionally, if you wish to provide any further information, you may contact the primary investigator at [REDACTED] If you wish to set up an interview to discuss your answers or other aspects of LARPing, please leave your preferred form of contact below. Once again, thank you for your participation.

Preferred contact means: email, facebook, or carrier-pigeon

Appendix D: Why do you LARP?

I implemented the survey presented to quickly gather information from the players so as to be able to know what to look for during my field research as well as to gain a plethora of information from players without disrupting game play to ask complicated questions. One question whose answer I feel are vital to understanding LARPing is “Why do you LARP?” Rather than dissect answers and create a chimeric answer, I believe it would be best to simply present some of the raw data of what players from across the Midwest and Atlantic coast have said for themselves. I have only edited the responses to remove specific names.

- “The community of friends is part of the draw, the physical exercise is another part, but the biggest draw for me is the escape from reality and the fun to be had. There are a lot of worse things that someone could be doing during their free time.”
- “I LARP because I get to spend an entire weekend with the people I love. Getting to come out and fight with foam weapons is also a marvelous stress reliver. Even with our system being lightest touch, it is amazing how much stress you can let go at a game.”
- “I LARP mostly to get to see and spend time with my friends, as this is a hobby that we all enjoy. It also allows me to focus my creativity, and to let it out in interesting ways that I wouldn't otherwise get to do. I have often written songs and stories for games, but they have been inspired by the RP, and would are not things that would have otherwise come about without the LARP. I don't often write stories, and songs don't tend to follow along the same creative directions.”
- “Because there is so much to it. I've made so many friends, I've learned a lot about , it's great exercise, there's so much room for creativity. Honestly, I get pretty much everything I need out of it, except for a paying job!”

- “Simply because it is fun. I’ve only run a couple small one-shot games since moving to NC, but am started to get the ‘itch’ to run my own game again!”
- “I will her up because it’s fun. It’s fun to get away from all the responsibilities and rules and problems of my real life into go do something else something that is entertaining. Something that involves people that has more interaction than just sitting and watching a movie or playing video games online. I need an built so many wonderful friendships Larping. I lark because I enjoy dressing and I enjoy playing pretend and this is a way for me to do it as an adult with other adults and explore adult themes and concepts.”
- “I larp largely because it is fun. I enjoy the acting it involves. i like being able to get away from the stress of my news environment and get lost in a make believe world out in the woods with my friends and the girl I love. Larping allows me to escape while still really enjoying myself. It’s also a fantastic way to get up and moving, which is a rarity in my job where I sit at a desk for hours on end.”
- “Because I am a Proud Geek. I used to play Dungeons and Dragons, back when it was just a box set. Figures made of lead. Multi-sided dice in a Crown Royal drawstring bag. But, that was probably before your time.” (Note: I do have these or had access to them)
- “[A really awesome player] invited me and it has always sounded like a really cool thing even in high school”
- “It’s fun. That’s a terse answer, but it’s the most fundamental and accurate.”
- “I LARP because its a great way to relieve stress and ignore the real world for a little bit, and the people I meet LARPing are some of the best friends I could ask for. And its just awesome to pretend to be a medieval badass.”

- “To make myself a better person as said before. But also it is a great way to practice with a sword which i have always wanted to be good at but never had an outlet for. It is also a great way to meet amazing people... And sometimes let out the frustrations of the month, not by hitting too hard just by hitting something.”
- “Creative expression”
- “My first LARP was a non-contact LARP that actually resolved conflict by playing rock-paper-scissors. I went simply because I was curious. I had moved to a new city, had no friends or family nearby, and had always been interested in the idea of LARP. I attended the game with a work acquaintance, and in a single four-hour session, met a number of people whom I still count as friends and even the man who would eventually become my husband. What had been a rough transition period to a new, strange city was turned completely around by LARP. I LARP because, with the exception of a few bad eggs along the way, it's a family. Dysfunctional, perhaps, and the members are always changing, but I've never known a social group so welcoming as LARPers.”
- “Fills a need. Can't quite describe it. I love the political maneuvering, the physical exertion, and the catharsis of doing things that I wouldn't do in my real life.”
- “I LARP for my own entertainment. The people are also a big deal. I enjoy socializing with friends IC and OOC. Especially those that aren't around often or live further away. It has become a way to step out of reality and see a different world; a live book. To be part of something new. New to me anyway. A stress reliever. I've learned that it's a good way to meet new people of all varieties. It's turned into something I'm proud of. LARPing is not for everyone.”
- “Get away from the world.”

- “I LARP because it give me a release from stress of everyday life. And Larping helps me cope with depression. I enjoy acting and singing, and being in worlds where you can be anything you can be. If it were not for LARPing or any type of Roleplaying table top or other wise, I would probably have committed suicide, and [my child] would never have been born.”
- “I have grown up watching heroes, playing in games as one and loving that who they are. I dreamed to be that awesome. The greater the fantasy, the greater the envy. I always wanted to be the one with the strength to save someone, fight for a belief. I find myself weak in real life. I could never use a sword or be confident enough to speak up. I do love helping though. At first I was taught by the world that LARP is almost taboo. People who do it are wierd and living a fantasy. I was wrong. They are all just people. Be whatever their reason, they are also there sharing their fantasy with me. I can be part of it. I can be a hero, help out, do what I choose. It's been a hell of a perspective changer. I can't say for now how long I will play, but I don't have any intention of quitting. I just take this as another choice I have made and maybe I might swap someone else into trying. I have found that some friends, though at first with wierd looks, became interested in the idea of trying it. Maybe I will tell others more close that might be less accepting in the future.”

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